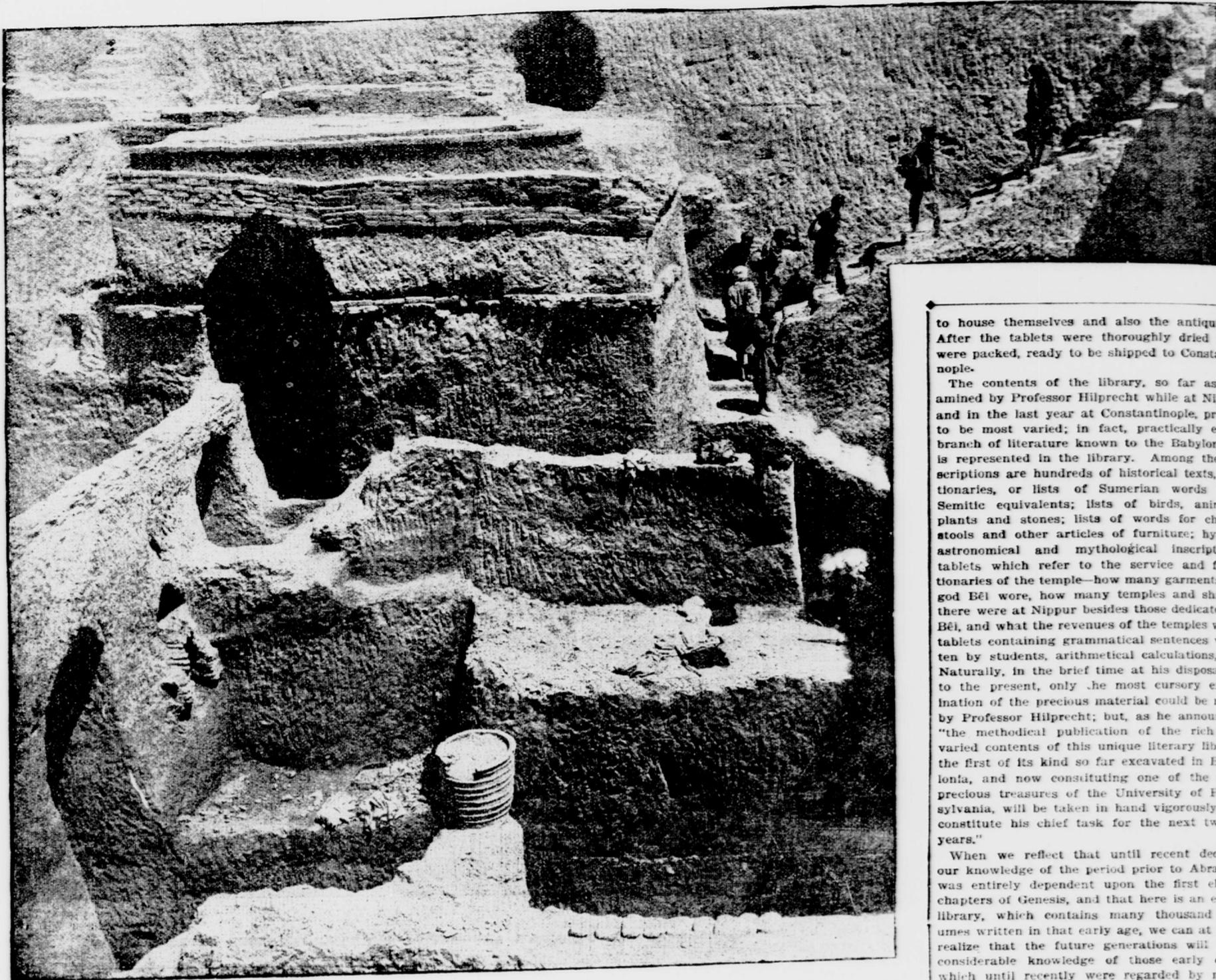


WRITINGS FROM THE TEMPLE OF BEL, DONE IN THE DAYS OF ABRAHAM, HAVE JUST REACHED THIS COUNTRY.



EXCAVATING AT THE TEMPLE OF BEL, IN THE PRESARGONIC STRATA, SHOWING EARLIEST KEYSTONE ARCH KNOWN AND A SACRIFICIAL VASE OF THE FIFTH MILLENNIUM BEFORE CHRIST.

## NIPPUR'S GREAT LIBRARY.

ESTIMATED THAT ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND TABLETS OF THIRD MILLENNIUM B. C. WILL BE TAKEN OUT.

Some of the most important archaeological material that ever came to America has just arrived at the University of Pennsylvania. A library of which every volume or tablet was written prior to Abraham's leaving Ur of the Chaldees was excavated in the recent campaign in Nippur. These treasures were brought to this country in twenty-two large cases, containing from six to eight boxes each. More than a year ago Professor Hilprecht left Philadelphia for Constantinople, expecting to continue his work of organizing the new Semitic section of the Imperial Ottoman Museum, which occupies the third new building recently erected at the Sultan's order, and at the same time examine and study the immense results of the last expedition to Nippur, which had arrived at Constantinople. As Professor Hilprecht was about to leave Constantinople the Sultan, who had theretofore on a number of occasions manifested his appreciation of the valuable services rendered by Professor Hilprecht, presented to him, among other important antiquities, the larger part of the famous temple library which was excavated by the expedition of the University of Pennsylvania. Professor Hilprecht in turn presented this magnificent collection of tablets to the institution which he represented.

A little over twenty-five years ago the intellectual world was startled by the announcement that Ashurbanapal's library had been discovered by the English explorers Layard and Smith, and that among the clay volumes there were accounts of the creation and deluge which much resembled the Biblical stories. It was then ascertained that these legends were copies of older tablets which belonged to Babylonian libraries in the southern part of the valley. For some time scholars have assumed that every important Babylonian city had its library, and that if they could be found most important data for the reconstruction of the early history of man would be forthcoming. Without detract-

ing, therefore, from the importance of the discovery of this ancient Assyrian library at Nineveh, the announcement that the library of the Great Temple of Bel, the most famous sanctuary of the early Babylonia, has been found surely must be regarded as being of even greater importance. The scribes of Ashurbanapal made no copies of tablets from this library, for it had been thrown into ruin over sixteen hundred years prior to his time. The Elamite hordes under Kudur-Nankhundi, 2285 B. C., who destroyed nearly every city of Babylonia, threw into ruins at the same time the temple library at Nippur, in which condition it remained until excavated. This fact determines that every tablet found in its ruins belongs to the period prior to this invasion, or, in other words, was written before or about the time Abraham left Southern Babylonia for the Promised Land.

About twelve years ago, when Professor Hilprecht first rode over the mounds at Nippur, he pointed out an extensive group of mounds south of the temple hill, which he regarded as the probable site of the temple library. About twenty-five hundred tablets were recovered from this mound in the first campaign. The mound was called Tablet Hill. Later excavations revealed many additional inscriptions, but on the recent campaign Professor Hilprecht was able to establish definitely that his old theory was correct. In the brief space of about eight weeks a series of "book stacks," or rooms, were cleared by his field director, Dr. Haynes, and a rich harvest of nearly twenty thousand tablets was gathered.

In the uppermost stratum of this mound the excavators found coffins which had been buried in the early centuries of our Christian era. A great many antiquities were also gathered which belonged to the Jews who continued to live at Nippur after the return of Ezra and Nehemiah. Prominent among them were terra cotta bowls containing incantations and charms inscribed in Hebrew and Mandæan. Down the excavators went, through twenty-five feet of accumulations of debris, representing several millenniums of history, when they finally came on the library. Here they found a series of rooms, a number of which contained ledges or shelves built out from the wall, for the purpose of laying out the tablets in rows. The library seems to have been divided into two parts. There

was a business section for keeping accounts, and the educational quarters, with a vast library of a literary character. Only the southeastern and northwestern wings of the immense edifice have thus far been cleared; in all about one-twentieth part of the entire library. Professor Hilprecht estimates, on a basis of the discoveries already made, on the topographical appearance of the mound and the history of the temple with which the library was connected, that when the entire mound has been completely excavated it will have yielded at least one hundred and fifty thousand tablets, every one of which belongs to the third millennium before Christ.

The clearing of the library was continued a few weeks after Professor Hilprecht's arrival at Nippur, when he withdrew the Arabic workmen from its ruins, owing to the shortness of the time at his disposal, and set them at work on the eastern fortifications of the city, at the same time having one of the architects make a ground plan of the rooms exposed. The complete excavation of this most important structure, with its precious literature of a long forgotten past, will require several years of continuous labor. While the destruction of temples, palaces, libraries and works of art which the Elamites then accomplished must be regarded as gross vandalism, yet in this particular instance, so far as the people of this day are concerned, it was most fortunate, for doubtless the tablets, being mostly unbaked, would have been destroyed long ago and their contents entirely lost if the Elamites had not destroyed the library building. When the roof collapsed, the tablets, which had been laid in rows, classified doubtless according to their contents, fell from the shelves to the floor in heaps, in which condition they were found.

It was a glorious sight for the excavators. They had found inscriptions and other valuable antiquities in various parts of the mounds during the previous twelve years but no discovery could be compared to this in extent and importance. One by one the tablets were carefully removed from their resting places by trained workmen. It was necessary to handle them tenderly, owing to the fact that they were moist from being buried for several millenniums in the earth. As they were taken from their resting places they were carried to the castle, which had been built by the excavators

to house themselves and also the antiquities. After the tablets were thoroughly dried they were packed, ready to be shipped to Constantinople.

The contents of the library, so far as examined by Professor Hilprecht while at Nippur and in the last year at Constantinople, proved to be most varied; in fact, practically every branch of literature known to the Babylonians is represented in the library. Among the inscriptions are hundreds of historical texts, dictionaries, or lists of Sumerian words with Semitic equivalents; lists of birds, animals, plants and stones; lists of words for chairs, stools and other articles of furniture; hymns, astronomical and mythological inscriptions, tablets which refer to the service and functionaries of the temple—how many garments the god Bel wore, how many temples and shrines there were at Nippur besides those dedicated to Bel, and what the revenues of the temples were; tablets containing grammatical sentences written by students, arithmetical calculations, etc. Naturally, in the brief time at his disposal up to the present, only the most cursory examination of the precious material could be made by Professor Hilprecht; but, as he announced, "the methodical publication of the rich and varied contents of this unique literary library, the first of its kind so far excavated in Babylonia, and now constituting one of the most precious treasures of the University of Pennsylvania, will be taken in hand vigorously and constitute his chief task for the next twenty years."

When we reflect that until recent decades our knowledge of the period prior to Abraham was entirely dependent upon the first eleven chapters of Genesis, and that here is an entire library, which contains many thousand volumes written in that early age, we can at least realize that the future generations will have considerable knowledge of those early days, which until recently were regarded by many scholars as mythical, and yet no one can even conjecture what is contained in the larger part of the mound, which up to the present remains untouched.

Several versions of the creation and deluge stories older than those found in Ashurbanapal's library have been discovered at other places. One of these is dated about 2000 B. C. It would not be surprising to find that versions of the same accounts older than those already recovered would be found in the great Nippur Library, besides other documents which would throw additional light on the early chapters of Genesis.

This is only one of the important discoveries of the recent campaign. Considerable attention was paid to the excavation of the great temple of Bel, the foundation of which was laid between six thousand and seven thousand years before Christ. An ancient government palace of immense proportions, where the kings lived, belonging to the fifth millennium before Christ, and one of the ancient gates and walls of the city were uncovered. A government palace erected about 300 B. C. was completely and systematically excavated, besides numerous other buildings of less importance. Most valuable inscriptions in stone belonging to the earliest rulers of Babylonia, by the help of which the early history of mankind in the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates will be reconstructed, were discovered. Antiquities in coins, jewelry in gold, silver and bronze in great quantities; vases in enamelled and plain pottery of all periods; seals and seal cylinders, such as the Babylonians used in connection with their business transactions; images of gods, playthings in terra cotta, bass-reliefs, weights, utensils in bronze, iron and silver, etc., were found. These are a few of the important things found, without mentioning the numerous facts ascertained and the many questions solved through the personal study of Professor Hilprecht while in the trenches, which have important bearing upon the religious ideas and customs of the daily life of the Babylonians.

Only a small portion of the mounds at Nippur has thus far been completely excavated. Considerable work yet remains to be done on the temple. Only one side of the ancient government palace has been cleared, and about one-twentieth part of the library. In view of the fact that the Sultan and his administrative body have manifested such a generous and friendly attitude toward the university, and especially toward her representative, who is the scientific director of the expedition, there is little doubt that this important work will be continued in the near future, especially as Professor Hilprecht has already completed all arrangements toward this end.