

THE EUPHRATES RIVER

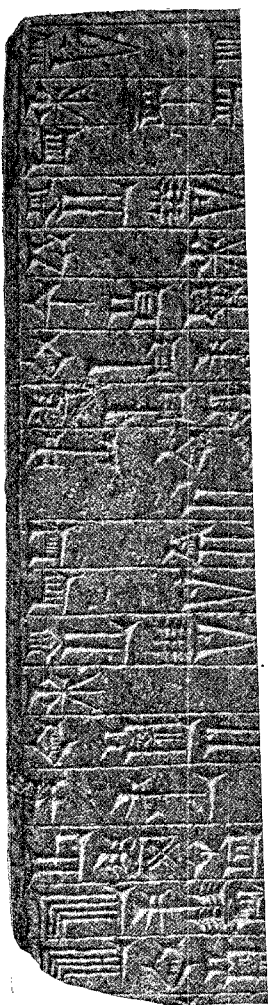
CHAPTER III

THE TIGRIS-EUPHRATES VALLEY

About 3500-538 B.C.

31. The Country of the Semites ; the two Rivers and their Influence. — Across the Arabian Gulf from Egypt is the sandy desert of Arabia. It is bounded on the northwest by Syria, a land of hills and mountains. Along the northeastern border extend the Persian Gulf and the valley of the Tigris and Eu-phra'tes rivers. In the south this valley is separated from Syria by the desert. Toward the north the two regions approach each other. The great Arabian desert and the hill and valley regions bordering it together formed the country of the Semites. As their history begins in the valley, we must study this region first.

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers rise in the mountains north of the Semite country. They flow in a southeasterly direction, and join together before emptying into the Persian Gulf. Along the middle course of the Tigris, chiefly on the east side, was As-syr'i-a, an undulating plain. Farther down on both sides of the Euphrates the valley is uniformly flat. This region was Bab-y-lo'ni-a. Here the valley was like that of the Nile. In its natural state it was



INSCRIPTION OF HAMMURABI
Recording the building of a
temple.
(Limestone tablet; British Museum)

inundated by the rivers in the spring and early summer. Hence a strong government was necessary for the building and repair of dikes and canals. The entire overflow was drawn off in these canals and used economically for irrigation. In this respect the system differed from the Egyptian. When the waters were properly regulated, the soil was as productive as that of the Nile valley. In some respects the country was less favored than Egypt. As it had no stone or suitable timber, the people were compelled to use brick almost exclusively for building. Then, too, there were no natural defences along the borders. It was therefore exposed to invasion on all sides, especially from the Arabian desert. The very fact, however, that the country was so accessible tended to bring the inhabitants more readily into relations with surrounding peoples. Because of such similarities and differences, we shall find the broad outline of Babylonian history and character like the Egyptian, though unlike it in detail. Particularly the influence of Babylonia on other countries was more widely extended.

32. Remains of the Civilization; Writing. — As the country has had little care for hundreds of years, much of it is now desolate. We find it seamed with the ruins of ancient canals and dotted over with mounds. In 1842 archaeologists began to excavate these heaps, and found them to be the ruins of ancient cities. The work still continues, and

every year new discoveries are made. Since 1893 the important city of Nip'pur has been excavated by Professor Hilprecht under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania. Walls, palaces, and temples were alike built of sun-dried brick, which soon crumbled. This accounts for their present condition. Libraries, too, have been found. The pages of a Babylonian book were thin clay tablets. Many documents were on cylinders of the same material. As the characters were engraved with a triangular instrument, they were wedge-shaped. This style of writing is known as *cu'nei-form* — from Latin *cu'ne-us*, a wedge. Before the middle of the past century scholars had succeeded in deciphering the script. The means employed were similar to those used in the case of the Rosetta stone.¹ The written material, described more fully below, is the chief source of our information for the history and life of the Babylonians and Assyrians.

33. The People: Origin and Antiquity. — The original home of the Semites was Arabia. There they were nomads, wandering about with their flocks from one oasis to another in search of pasture. When the population became so great that the barren country could no longer support it, swarms of these fierce barbarians poured out into the more habitable countries, northwest and northeast. Swampy Babylonia could not support many people, however, and the nomads seem to have been incapable of making the necessary improvements.

The work was successfully undertaken by another people, the *Su-me'ri-ans*. We do not know who they were, but scholars are inclined to believe that they came from the northeast. Possibly their earlier home was the country beyond the Caspian Sea, where the remains of a very ancient civilization have recently been unearthed.² However that may be, they were the first to build dikes and dig canals, to make the country fit for agriculture. They invented cuneiform writing, and in brief created the earliest civilization of Babylonia. Most of the cities they founded were in the south of the country. Although we do not know when they in-

¹ § 12.

² The exploration was conducted by Mr. Raphael Pumpelly, who has published the results in *Explorations in Turkestan, Expedition of 1904*, 2 vols., 1908.

vaded the valley, we are certain that in the fourth millennium (4000-3000) B.C. they were living there in cities. At that time they were about as far advanced in civilization as the Egyptians had been a thousand years earlier.¹ When a new overflow of Semites from Arabia poured into the valley, these late-comers found much of the country under cultivation. The two races began a long struggle for the mastery. Meanwhile the Semites adopted the culture of the more advanced Sumerians and founded cities of their own — generally in the north of Babylonia.

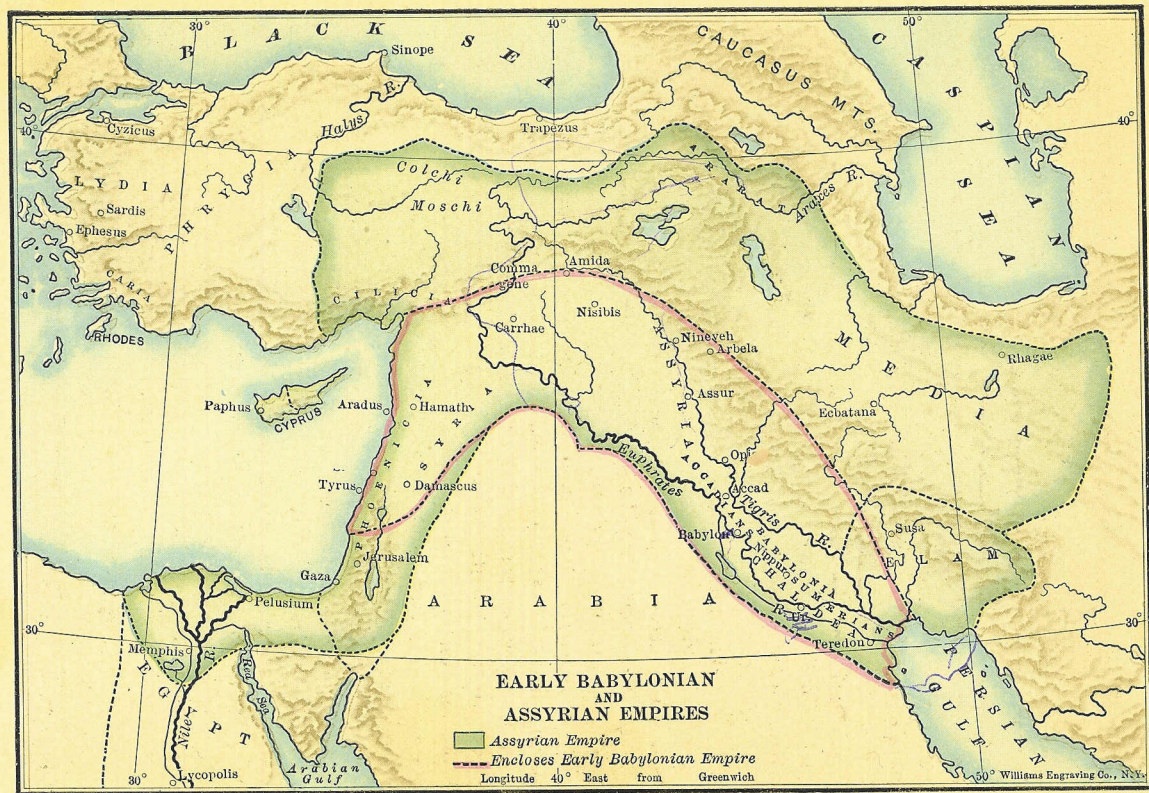
34. Period of the City-Kingdoms (about 3500-1917 B.C.). — For a long time the country, like Egypt, was divided into a number of states, each centring in a single city. Among the important cities were Sumerian Ur and Semitic Ac'cad and Babylon. There were from the beginning endless wars among the states. The more powerful subdued the weaker, and built up greater kingdoms. The names and deeds of many of these early rulers are known to us through the records they have left. But the first whose name need here be mentioned was Sar'gon, king of Accad about 2500 B.C.² First he united all Babylonia under his crown. Then, continuing his conquests, he extended his realm eastward far into Elam, northward to the upper waters of the Tigris, and westward over northern Syria to the Mediterranean. Probably he crossed to Cyprus. From his time we find the influence of Babylon there. His conquests brought Syria and Babylonia into close relations. Each got the products and ideas of the other. The greater share of benefit came to Syria, however, which was behind Babylonia in civilization. At home the conqueror built temples to the gods and a great palace for himself. In appreciation of his own power as ruler of nearly all the known world, he began to call himself a god. The empire he created was the first known to history, far earlier than the Egyptian.³ Having no organization, however, it soon fell to pieces.

The place of Accad was taken in part by Ur. The empire built up by its kings was smaller, and lasted but little more than a century.

¹ The fact that the Egyptian civilization began about a thousand years earlier than the Sumerian is proved beyond a doubt by the monuments.

² The city is now usually called Agade, and the country in which it was situated Accad. The date formerly given, 3800 B.C., is now found to be incorrect. 2500 is only approximate; he might have lived a century or two earlier.

³ § 17.



The period, though short, was one of unusual progress in the arts. After its downfall other cities contended for the supremacy, with more or less success. Meanwhile Babylon was coming to the front. Ham-mu-ra'bi, king of this city (1958-1916 B.C.), brought all Babylonia under his sway.

It is worthy of notice that the period just reviewed, though one of continual strife within and of invasions from without, brought Babylonian civilization to its highest point. Thereafter was some political advance, but cultural stagnation and decline.

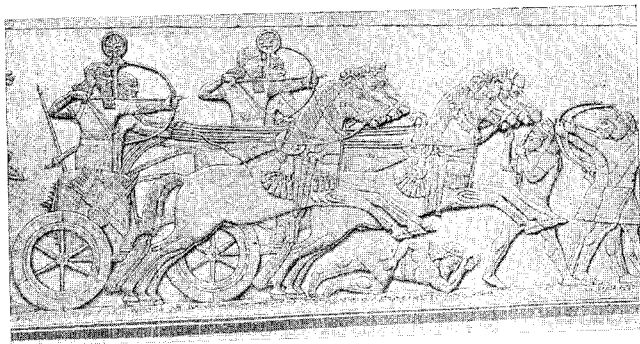
35. The First Supremacy of Babylon (1917 to about 1250 B.C.). — We may date the beginning of the Old Babylonian empire¹ from the year in which Hammurabi completed the unification of Babylonia (1917). His realm included also western Elam, Assyria, and Syria. Hammurabi is especially famous for his code (written collection) of laws. There were written laws before him, and one or more collections, but his is the earliest that has survived. A stone on which it was copied was found by explorers in 1901-1902. For hundreds of years it continued in force in the country of the two rivers. After about three centuries Babylonia declined and lost her foreign possessions. Assyria became first an independent state and then a rival. About 1250 B.C. an Assyrian king conquered Babylon. Though the latter city recovered freedom for a time, she remained during the next six centuries overshadowed by the superior power on her northern border.

36. The Assyrian Supremacy (about 1250-606 B.C.). — The Assyrians were Semites. At this time they were behind the Babylonians in civilization, but were adopting their habits of life, their inventions, and their religious beliefs. Composed largely of free peasants, the nation was strong in war, as such nations always are. As a rival of Babylon, Assyria had already created and lost an empire. After 1250 B.C. she continued her struggle for power with varying fortune. Her greatest successes were achieved in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. At that time her empire became the greatest the world had known. It reached from the

¹ Till recently, historians have been accustomed to call the old empire "Chaldean"; but it is now well known that the Chaldeans, a fresher Semitic tribe, did not invade Babylonia till about 1000 B.C.

Persian Gulf to the Black Sea, and from above Memphis on the Nile nearly to the Caspian Sea.

All the empires thus far formed were made up of tributary states under native kings. These rulers were ready to revolt at every opportunity. So loose a system gave no promise of lasting long. The first state to make a business of war, conquest, and govern-



ASSYRIANS IN BATTLE

(From Hommel, *Geschichte Babyloniens und Assyriens*)

ment on a large scale was Assyria. Her great improvement was the division of the subject country into provinces (sa'tra-pies), each ruled by a governor appointed by the Assyrian king. The governor's duty was to command the army of his district, administer justice, and oversee the collection of the annual tribute. Under him were the native kings, who enjoyed far less power and independence than had those of earlier empires. Another policy of the government was to transplant great numbers of the subjects from one part of the empire to another. By this means it aimed to uproot local patriotism and to make the people more dependent. As the peasant class died out, the king composed his army of mercenaries, who could be supported only by plunder and excessive taxation. His rule was utterly selfish and oppressive, and he failed to protect his subjects from foreign invasion.

The empire came to a sudden end. The Babylonians revolted, and with the Medes, a powerful people east of Assyria, they laid

siege to Nin'e-veh, the populous and wealthy capital of the empire. After two years they captured and sacked it. When they had finished their work, its splendid temples and palaces were ruins. At the same time the empire fell (606 B.C.).

Persons and Events in Assyrian History for Reference

- 1125. Tig'lath-Pi-le'ser I, first notable Assyrian conqueror.
- 860-783. First great age of Assyria.
- 745-727. Tiglath-Pileser II, a great organizer as well as conqueror.
- 722-705. Sar'gon, a great organizer and statesman; Assyria at the height of her glory.
- 705-680. Sen-nach'e-rib wages war with Egypt and Israel, and destroys Babylon.
- 680-668. E'sar-had'don rebuilds Babylon and conquers Egypt.
- 668-626. As'shur-ban'i-pal, the last magnificent king.
Egypt and Media become independent.
The Scyth'i-ans invade the empire.
- 606. The destruction of Nineveh.

37. The Second Supremacy of Babylon (606-538 B.C.). — About 1000 B.C. a fresh horde of Semites — the Chaldeans — had poured from Arabia into southern Babylonia. While conquering the country, they had struggled to shake off from it the Assyrian yoke. The fall of Nineveh and the second supremacy of Babylon were due chiefly to these people, who now held full possession of the country. From them it got the name Chal-de'a. Their kings sat upon the throne. The most brilliant was Neb-u-chad-nez'zar. In an able reign of forty-four years he enlarged his dominion westward to the Mediterranean. The greater part of his energy he devoted to the improvement of his country and to its defence against the Median empire, which extended along his northern border. He fortified this frontier with a brick wall a hundred feet high, and surrounded his city with massive defences. Babylon was now a square about forty miles in circuit. Within the vast walls the space was divided by streets, as in the most improved modern cities, into rectangular blocks occupied by houses three or four stories high. Here and there rose gigantic palaces and temples. One of the greatest buildings of this king was the "hanging garden." It towered to a great

height in terraces, and was supplied by engines with water from the river. This artificial mountain was built to please his Median queen, who had grown up in a hill country. Under him and for a long time afterward Babylon was the greatest, richest, and most attractive city in the world. His successors, however, were weak, and some years after his death the city fell into the hands of the Persians.¹

38. Summary of Political History. — (1) In the earliest known times there were many small city-kingdoms endlessly at war with one another (3500-1917 B.C.). (2) One of them, Accad, under Sargon created a short-lived empire (2500). (3) Finally Hammurabi (1917) united them all under Babylon. He is noted, too, for his law code. The empire he established comprised western Elam, Assyria, and Syria. (4) In time Babylon lost these foreign possessions, but did not wholly yield its supremacy till it was conquered by Assyria (1250). The empire of the latter reached its height in the eighth and seventh centuries. It was greater in extent and far better organized than any before it. (5) In 606 its capital, Nineveh, was destroyed, and the empire was divided between the victorious Medes and Babylonians. The new Babylonian empire, though short-lived, was brilliant, especially under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. (6) Soon after his death it was conquered by the Persians (538).

39. Civilization: Social Classes. — The law recognized three great classes: the rich, the poor (free laborers), and the slaves. The rich comprised the few landed proprietors, the king's officials, the merchants and bankers, and the priests. Most merchants and bankers, however, were included in the priestly class. Some of the free laborers were artisans in the cities, but the great mass were tenants on the land. They paid a share of the produce to the owner. Though legally free, they enjoyed, in fact, but little liberty. The slaves formed a large class, employed mostly in the industries. There were two chief proprietors of the soil, "the palace" (king) and "the god." The palace revenues went to the support of the king and his officials and army, those of the god, to the priests as in Egypt.

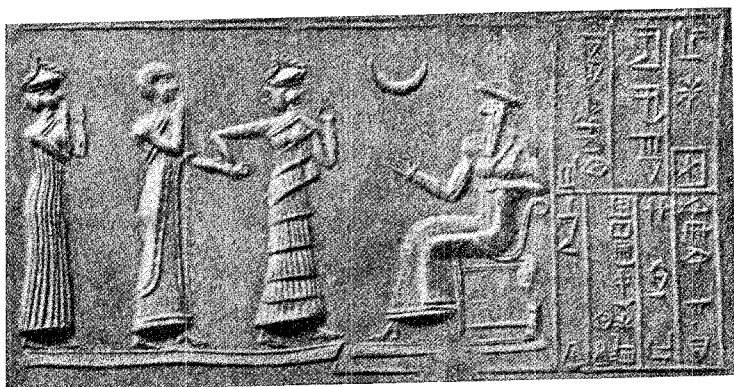
40. Industry and Commerce. — The principal livelihood was agriculture. The chief products of the farm were meat and wool, grain, dates, and palm oil. Some parts of the country yielded petroleum for lighting, naphtha, and salt; and in the Persian Gulf were pearl fisheries. Among the skilled industries brick-making took the leading place. The people were celebrated for their skilfully embroidered tapestries and carpets for the adornments of walls, sofas, beds, and floors. We hear, too, of their gold, silver, glass, and bronze wares, their excellent house furniture, finely woven and brilliantly colored linens, muslins, and woollens, their canes delicately chased with figures of fruit or animals, perfumed oils, and many other articles of use and luxury. Their wood and ivory carvings were highly prized by foreigners. Not the least valuable products were the engraved precious stones used especially for seals. Cities such as Babylon and Nineveh were the seats of luxury to which a great variety of industries contributed.

These works imply an extensive commerce. They imported incense, spices, and gums from Arabia; precious stones, red dyes, and hunting dogs from India and its neighborhood; the metals chiefly from the interior of Asia; silk from the remote East; purple dyes and cedar from western Syria. Ivory, ostrich feathers, and panther skins came from Africa. Trade routes radiated from Babylon in every direction by water and land to distant countries. Along these lines ships and caravans travelled back and forth, exchanging the goods of the world. For centuries Babylon was its commercial centre.

41. The Reign of Law. — The laws of Hammurabi regulated buying, selling, and contracts, recompenses for damage to property, punishments for wrong-doing, the rights of women and children, the treatment of slaves, inheritance, and adoption, — in brief, everything in life. They even fixed the price of labor of men and animals. To be valid, an agreement had to be made in writing before witnesses and carefully sealed. The code shows a high sense of justice, though many punishments were severe. In injuries to the body the law of retaliation prevailed — “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” From this code, as well as from other sources, we can study the condition of women. Polygamy was permitted

as among other Oriental peoples, but in practice was limited to the rich. In a family of several wives one was chief and the others subordinate. Women could transact business and inherit and bequeath property. In fact, their condition seems to have been as favorable as in Egypt. The civilization pictured by these laws was highly developed. It was very old — far older than ours. It had passed its prime and was declining.

42. Religion and Literature. — The Babylonian religion had the same origin as the Egyptian.¹ In fact, all pagan religions began with the worship of objects of nature. But the people of the Tigris-



CYLINDER-SEAL OF AN EARLY KING

The king is led by a priest into the presence of the Moon-God.

(British Museum)

Euphrates valley were more inclined than the Egyptians to revere as gods the sun, moon, and stars. Heaven, Earth, and Sea were likewise great deities. As the people grew in knowledge, they were more inclined to regard as deities the spirits of those objects rather than the things themselves. Every locality and every association of men had its gods. More important was the chief deity of the city-kingdom, and greatest of all was the god of an imperial capital, as Nineveh or Babylon. Religion had to do mainly with life on earth. To the future world the Babylonians paid little heed, and

¹ § 24.

their view of death was gloomy. Some features of their religion were moral, others the opposite. The literature, written by the priests and stored in libraries, was mostly religious. It prescribed in great detail the ceremonies of worship, the forms of magic for repelling evil spirits, the prayers for soothing the anger of the gods and for winning their favor. The priests invented many ways of divination — of discovering the will of the gods. The best means they could find was the examination of the liver of an animal offered



CLAY MODEL OF A LIVER

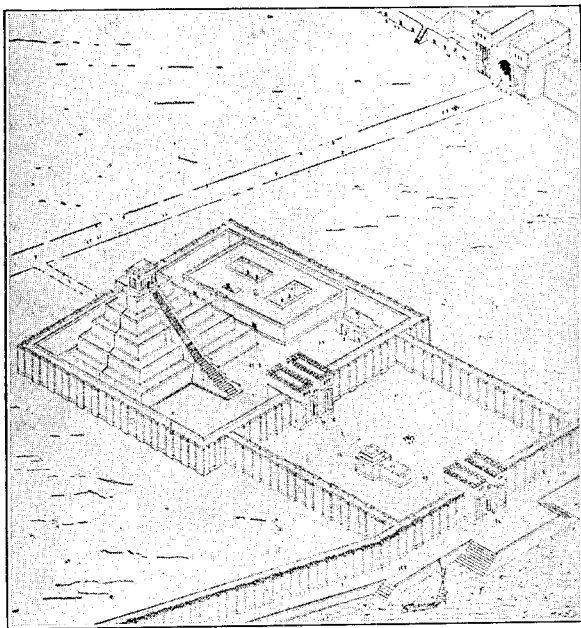
Inscribed with magical formulae ; used in divination.

(British Museum)

in sacrifice. This kind of divination they made into a complicated system. Another means of foretelling the future was the study of the heavenly bodies, especially of the sun, moon, and five known planets. In this way they created astrology. All this priestly lore was reduced to writing.

Many of the religious texts were composed in both Semitic and Sumerian. Grammars and dictionaries were necessary in the study

of the "dead language." Their scientific works included mathematics, astronomy, and geography, zoölogy, botany, and mineralogy. Their history was a record of each king's achievements, written by his scribe with extravagant flattery. More attractive are the hymns and religious myths. They created the epic — a poem of considerable length which celebrates in narrative form the deeds



BABYLONIAN TEMPLE AT NIPPUR

(From Hilprecht, *Explorations in Bible Lands*. With the permission of the publishers, A. J. Holman and Co.)

of real or mythical heroes. One of these poems includes an account of the great flood and the building of the ship in which one human family alone was saved. Another religious epic gives an account of the creation of the world by one of their gods. These tales are somewhat like the Biblical stories of the same events.

43. Astronomy and the Calendar. — Most of the sciences have been mentioned in connection with industries and literature. Their greatest advance was in astronomy. From immemorial time the priests in their lofty temples watched the sky and recorded daily the movements of the stars. They soon learned to foretell eclipses, and determined almost precisely the length of the solar year. They divided it into twelve months of thirty days each. As this reckoning left the year short by about five days, they made the correction by inserting an additional month whenever necessary. The month they divided approximately into four weeks of seven days each. The days of the week bore the names of the sun, moon, and five known planets. The day contained twelve hours, which were double the length of our own. The hours they measured by the water-clock and the sun-dial, which they had invented.

Though the decimal system was known, the notation chiefly used was based on 10×6 or $12 \times 5 = 60$ (hence called sexagesimal). The standard weight was the talent, divided into sixty minas. The mina, weighing nearly $1\frac{1}{3}$ pounds, contained sixty shek'els. Their measures of length were based originally on the finger, hand, foot, and arm.

44. Architecture and Sculpture. — Most of the arts have been considered above in connection with the industries. It remains to speak of architecture and sculpture. As above stated, all their great works — temples, palaces, and walls of defence — were necessarily of brick. As a foundation for a temple or palace the king erected a huge rectangular terrace, forty or more feet high. The object seems to have been to raise the building above the dampness of the earth, and to make it more imposing. On this foundation, often covering several acres, the king built his oblong palace or temple. The flat roof rested on cedar beams. High above all the rest of the building rose a



A BABYLONIAN KING

pyramidal tower. It was solid, and was terraced all the way up the sides, as shown in the illustration. The summit was the home of the god. The palaces of the Assyrian kings were vast. A certain one in Nineveh covered twenty-five acres, and contained about two hundred rooms.¹ These great works were constructed



COLOSSAL BULL WITH WINGS AND HUMAN HEAD
Held by a mythical person. From a doorway of the
palace of Sargon, 722-705 B.C.
(British Museum)

on principles now lost to the world. In some of the earliest the round arch was used, long before it was known to other nations.

The interior walls of Babylonian buildings were covered with glazed tiles. Those of the Assyrian palace were decorated with reliefs engraved on stone. The doorways were guarded by colossal human-headed beasts of the same material. In general the sculpture of the period of

city-kingdoms was truer to nature; in later time it grew stiff and conventional. The artist did not study carefully the human form, for he looked upon the body as base. He preferred to represent men arrayed in gorgeous clothing, armies, and scenes of battle. Having plenty of stone in their country, the Assyrians were more accustomed than the Babylonians to use it for decoration. Lack-

¹ That of King Sargon (722-705). This ruler should be distinguished from the earlier Sargon of Accad.

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