



CTHULHU BRITANNICA
LONDON

— The Journal of —
**Reginald
Campbell Thompson**



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Sirs -

I enclose with this letter a journal that might be of interest, given our recent conversations on the matter of Nineveh - and Nabu. The journal is purported to have been written by Reginald Campbell Thompson during his 1919 expedition to Nineveh where, it is rumoured - but never confirmed - he found the Temple of Nabu.

As you may know, Thompson is a prominent archaeologist and a leading light in the field of Assyriology and the study of cuneiform tablets. In 1903 he accompanied Leonard William King in an expedition to discover the site of ancient Nineveh in Iraq, but fell short of finding the Temple of Nabu. It is my hypothesis that he returned to Nineveh in 1919, where he found and successfully excavated the temple. I believe this journal lends credence to that theory.

Unfortunately I am at this moment unable to verify its true provenance. It was found, forgotten - or deliberately hidden, perhaps - down the back of a drawer in an office once used by Thompson; the handwriting is certainly similar to his. But there still remains the thorny issue about the expedition itself: no public record exists that it or any excavation took place there in 1919, and any attempt to press Thompson or the British Museum for comment returns a stony silence.

And yet, if the events described herein are true - and having seen what we have can we afford to be sceptical? - they could prove to be the key to unlocking the events that we find ourselves overtaken by.

I trust you will know what to do.

Yours faithfully,

ERP

Theodore Rayburn-Price

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- Thursday 8th May 1919 -

To-day we spent our last day in Marseilles. While my fellows bid their last adieu to Europe, I stood for some time on the shore, beholding with varied emotions the vast expanse of the Mediterranean before me. On the shores of that sea have existed the mightiest empires of the past, now fallen into ruin. The works of man's genius are long gone, and yet the creations of Deity shine fresh and fair still. What the eye may mark with sorrow as shadows and wrecks of civilisations past, the dark blue sea meets with indifference, displaying neither alteration nor change beneath the sunny skies of the south. I shall hold that moment in my mind as we travel to the east, for there we will see scant comfort of balmy climes and civilised lands. Where I plan to lead this expedition is an altogether different prospect.

Now from the deck of the Turkish steamer 'İzmir', I contemplate the men who accompany me. Each was hand-picked for this expedition, though not all, I regret, by me. There is much at stake on this expedition, and many with vested interests; to bear the responsibility alone would suit me, certainly, but not those who have invested so much time and money into making this endeavour a reality. What I wouldn't give to have King back by my side. Yet the thought of returning to Nineveh and finally uncovering the temple proved too much for his heart. A lifetime's dream, thrown away in a moment of madness. I must confess that my five companions, though all perfectly competent, are poor replacements for so estimable a fellow as Leonard King.

First there is Willard Puncheon, one of the few cuneiformists in England whom I would trust with the reading of my manuscripts. He has an extraordinary talent for the ancient language of the Assyrians well in advance of my own, and has thus far proven to be a pillar of discretion. He is not physically set for the possible exertions of a dig of this nature, but I shall endeavour to spare him undue hardship. Lord Brightman is a different sort of man

altogether. Though a keen historian and collector of eastern antiquities, he is a man of action, and he accompanies us for the glory.

His patronage is vital to this expedition, and he was a dear friend of Leonard's. Next we have MacAvoy and Simpkins. These men were not my first choice at all, but were rather foisted upon me by my investors at the British Museum, whose contacts and funding are invaluable. Still, the two of them are decent enough archaeologists, albeit ones with little practical experience. Finally we have Thomas Banksmith. I am glad to have Banksmith back on the expedition, but after the trouble we had last time I was surprised that he volunteered. I suspect he's here out of some sense of duty to Leonard — blames himself somewhat for not shouldering more of the burden after what we found in '03. I shall write no more of that — all I need to say is that Banksmith is a fine fellow indeed, and his very presence here is testament to his character.

Four others will meet us when we berth in Constantinople. Two of them are my men, Pritchard and Mulgrave, sent ahead to secure guides and transportation across Turkey. The Belgian, Vervloet, would likely have made the trip alone if we hadn't beat him to the punch, and I fear we will have an uneasy alliance with him. The other is Vervloet's man, Tuomas — I know nothing of him save the name. It is typical of Vervloet to bring a manservant on an archaeological dig, but I am thankful at least he has kept his entourage to a minimum. We do not want to attract any undue attention in Constantinople.

Our fellow passengers are a motley group, who will be travelling companions to our expedition for the next week at least. Bearded Frenchmen and Italians contrast strangely with the sons of the East, with their red caps and blue tassels. We six Englishmen must stand out considerably, with our pale complexions and uniform white travelling-suits. And yet it does not matter; as we leave France behind, we embrace at last anonymity. The secrecy of our mission — nay, our quest — is finally assured.

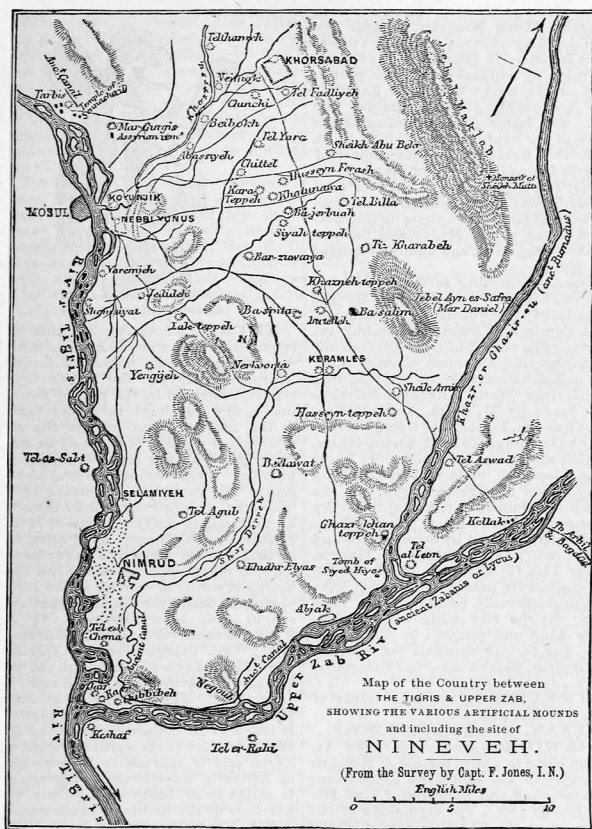
- Monday 12th May 1919 -

I spent a productive few hours in the company of Willard Punccheon this evening. It has been difficult to get him alone during the voyage, but finally we were able to go through the notes from my previous visit to the temple, and the transcriptions of the royal tablet found in Kouyunjik. Willard was barely able to contain himself when he realised the magnitude of the discovery, but I was able to calm him and swear him to secrecy, revealing my own position as an intelligence agent to do so. If Lord Brightman catches wind of just what we're on to, I do not fully trust him to keep to our arrangement, especially with Vervloet sniffing around in Constantinople.



One fascinating development to come from the meeting with Willard was the translation of a key set of symbols on my map. What I had thought to be merely a set of elemental signs common to an Assyrian temple are, it seems, something slightly different.

Willard translated the cuneiform as "The Elements of Release" — not figurative elements but literal ones. From his own experience, he is certain that this relates to a physical treasure — artefacts sealed within the Temple of Nabu for thousands of years. That there would be items of great archaeological value within the temple was never in doubt; that there may be great treasures of singular importance to understanding Assyrian religious practices increases the need for secrecy on this dig. The Iraqis must not realise that the site is of any greater significance than, say, the Mound of Nebu Yunus, or our expedition will be over before it has truly begun.



- Wednesday 14th May, 1919, Constantinople -

After a lengthy journey in the somewhat austere confines of the İzmir, we were all glad when finally we made port. Constantinople was only just awakening when we arrived, the sun still pale in the eastern sky, and it seemed unlikely that we would be able to track down Vervloet



and the others in so labyrinthine a city before the allotted hour. And so we set about to find some amusement until the time of our noon rendezvous came. We left MacAvoy to supervise the unloading of our gear, and its transfer to our lodgings. Banksmith and I had selected poor lodging on the edge of town, near to the freight train station — this arrangement suited our clandestine needs perfectly, although all others in the party to a man had expressed disappointment that they would be spared any home comforts while in Constantinople.

Our first movement was to the coffee-house directly in front of the dock. This was a low wooden building with a large piazza all around it. Inside and out there was a raised platform against the wall. This platform was one step from the floor, and on this step every one left his shoes before taking his seat on the matting. Even at such an early hour, there were, perhaps, fifty Turks inside and out having finished their morning prayers already; sitting cross-legged, smoking the chibouk, and drinking coffee out of cups not larger than the shell of a Madeira-nut.

We kicked our shoes off on the steps, seated ourselves on a mat outside, and took our chibouk and coffee with an air of *savoir faire* that would not have disgraced the worthiest Moslem of them all. Though it was early for Europeans to be out and about in the city, we did not attract much undue attention. Even so, only when the patrons began to take their leave and the coffee-house quietened did we finally begin to discuss our travel arrangements for the next day, and even then in rather hushed tones. First thing in the morning, we would ride the train with our equipment to Ankara, where we would purchase provisions for the trek across inland Turkey. That we were not sailing the coast surprised everyone. Banksmith and I had agreed in advance to only reveal each leg of the journey to our companions as required. The

air of mystery had not suited everyone in the party, and I confess that I had already entrusted Willard with more information than I'd wanted to — but everyone understood the need for secrecy, and so the grumbling was kept to a minimum.

Once our coffee was done, we entered the walls and made a circuit of the district. It was a dirty little place, comprising many streets lined with shops or bazaars; every third shop, almost, being a cafeteria, where a parcel of huge turbaned fellows were at their daily labours of smoking pipes and drinking coffee. The first thing I remarked as being strikingly different from a European city was the total absence of women. The streets were thronged with men, and not a woman was to be seen, except occasionally I caught a glimpse of a white veil or a pair of black eyes sparkling through the latticed bars of a window.

At noon, Brightman and I stood beneath the shade of a large cantina, a stone's throw from the central mosque of the district. Sure enough, as prompt as ever, Vervloet and his man appeared. They had arrived in Constantinople some two days earlier, and had already had some discussion with Jack Pritchard and Edward Mulgrave, who Vervloet informed me were awaiting us in the cooler climes of our lodging-house. Vervloet had already used his head-start to engage additional servants from amongst the populace, and had by all accounts attracted much undue attention in the city with his swagger and reckless spending. Brightman was furious, of course, but kept his counsel.

- Addendum, same day -

As I had anticipated, Vervloet was most annoyed at our plans to leave Constantinople overland. He had, he said, already secured berths aboard a merchant vessel to take us to Samsun on the north coast. The trek would be two days shorter that way, certainly, but I was loathe to enter any port where Vervloet was well known. His financiers had made certain of the Belgian's presence upon the expedition, but I would not trust him to keep his own counsel when amongst allies and confederates. Brightman insisted on our unconventional route most fervently, and without his Lordship's intervention I fear Vervloet may have persuaded a majority of our party to his course.

What we did not — nay, could not — tell Vervloet is that the British garrison at Ankara had already been informed of our coming, and a lieutenant in the intelligence agency had made some arrangements for us already in regard to our onward travel overland.

- Friday 16th May, 1919 -

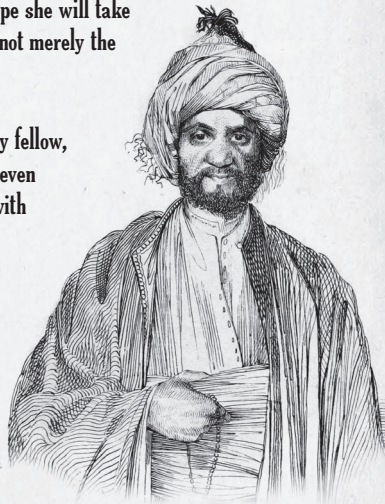
At Ankara we set about finding servants and horses for the long trek ahead. I was grateful for Pritchard's presence, as he speaks the Turk tongue better than any of us, and coupled with my own penchant for hard bartering with the plains peoples, we had little trouble organising ourselves. As soon as I could get away, I rendezvoused with Lieutenant Smyth of

the light dragoons stationed outside the city walls. He had found me a loyal Tartar who, with a few of his men, would serve as protectors and guides. They were no lovers of the Iraqis, having engaged in military patrols along the southern borders for many years, and I was assured that they were loyal to the Crown, and sworn to secrecy.

For my part, I sent four telegrams home, with instructions that any replies should be sent directly to the British Embassy in Iraq a week hence. The first was to my dear Barbara, informing her that I was well and that I would think of her often. The second was to the British Museum, telling them in most guarded terms that final arrangements should be made for the transport of goods from Tripoli and then on to Cyprus, where the British consulate would take care of the rest. Most of our party would return northwards whence we came, while a few — my man Banksmith amongst them — would accompany the precious cargo, and these mysterious “elements” that I am now so anxious to secure.

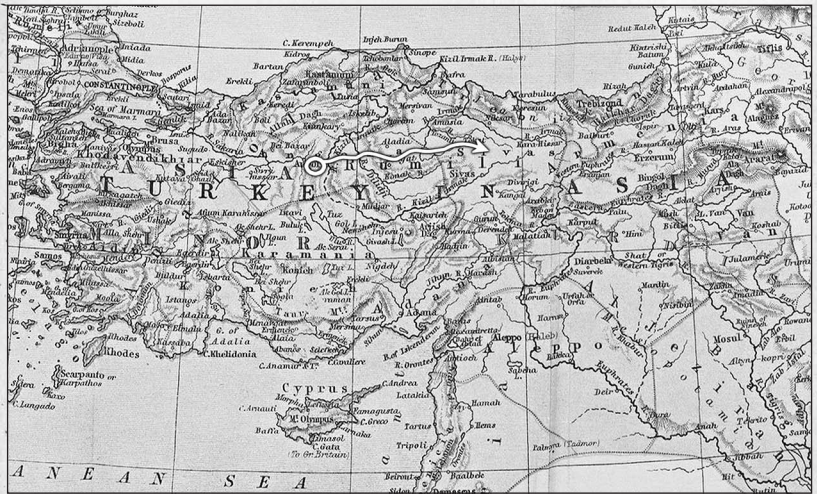
The third telegram was to my man in Mosul, and was written in Latin, for although he is an Arab we share together a love of classical languages which has been very useful to us in coded messages over the years. The final telegram was almost an afterthought, but went to the poor widow of Leonard King. In it, I pledged that I would finish what we had started in her husband’s name. I hope she will take my oath as the kindness that was intended, and not merely the foolish pride of men.

My Tartar, whose name is Jibrīl, is a big swarthy fellow, with an extent of beard and moustaches unusual even among his bearded countrymen. He was armed with a pair of enormous pistols and a yataghan, and is, altogether, a formidable fellow to look upon. But there was a something about him that I liked. There was a doggedness, a downright stubbornness that seemed honest. I knew nothing about him save for Smyth’s recommendation.



When he saw me seated on my horse he stood by my side a little distance off and, looking at me without opening his lips, drew his belt tight around him, and adjusted his pistols and yataghan. His manner seemed to say that he took charge of me as a bale of goods, to be paid for on safe delivery, and that he would carry me through with fire and sword, if necessary.

We leave for Sivas at first light and then, God willing, we shall reach Iraq unmolested. There is a large group of us now, with many horses and followers, and we shall do well for word of our passing not to reach home before we reach our goal.



- Tuesday 20th May 1919 -

From the moment we left Sivas, mountains and rocks have been our constant companions, and the journey is proving hard-going, even with our guides and our caravan of pack-horses. We left Mezraa before daybreak, and were hardly clear of the town before we began our ascent. The paths were steep and dangerous, but as we crested the mountain we were greeted by a view of such magnificence that it more than made up for our toil. We stood upon the ridge of a mountain in a horseshoe of similar eminences, in the midst of which was a vast lake, which sparkled in the late afternoon sun. In this foreign land, far from any Christian church, it stirred the spirits to see God's hand in action, especially on a Sunday. From that lofty, snow-capped peak we could see the route our journey would take, southwards to Argana Maaden, the last true town on our journey before we take the gruelling track to Mosul. And yet, the promise of future hardships paled as the glorious view lifted our spirits. Even Vervloet was, for once, stuck for words. That in itself was a prize worthy of the ascent.

- Addendum, same day, 11pm -

We are camped at the foot of the mountains, with the worst of the Turkish terrain behind us. Lord Brightman has just been to see me, requesting that we adjust our route to take in the town of Al Qamishli on the Syrian border. It is against my better judgement to divert to so large a settlement so near to Iraq, and in a troubled region, but Brightman has insisted. He has a point that we ought to send further telegrams home to more easily arrange for the transporting of our discoveries, and to report in to our sponsors. However, the last time we visited Al Qamishli was on the return journey from Mosul, and we were stalked every step of the way by spies. Brightman has come prepared this time, it seems, with enough guns to arm us against any trouble. And yet it is not rogues I fear, but rather who the rogues will

inform of our passing. I have had no luck in changing Brightman's mind — our guides have already been given their instructions, and His Lordship would brook no argument!

- Friday 23rd May, 1919 -

It is true I was reluctant to enter Al Qamishli, but the sight of the town as we approached at sunset lifted everyone's spirits. The opportunity to indulge in a bath and a smoke felt like luxury, even in the squalid lodging-house that I procured. Truly I have been too long in England, for I have gone soft! Banksmith alone seems inured to creature comforts — I think he would be happier staying in the saddle all the way to Mosul. I write this entry but briefly, for the invitation of a proper bed has brought sleep upon me quickly.



- Addendum, same night -

I awoke shortly before two in the morning, and heard muffled voices from the rooms below mine. I am not usually such a light sleeper, but something evidently roused me from slumber. And so I went downstairs to investigate.

Below my room was the large seating area of a cantina, all in darkness save for one burning candle. I heard Brightman's voice clearly, speaking in Arabic to a man whose identity I could not discern. Something about their conspiratorial tones made me check my advance to a creep, and thus carefully I tried to gain a better vantage point. I saw only the silhouette of a man in the traditional headdress of the Arabs, and could make out little of what the two were speaking of except for the clear iteration of our destination — Mosul.

I must have inadvertently made some noise, for both men stopped talking suddenly, and Lord Brightman turned to where I was hiding near the stairs. I had no choice but to reveal

my position, and merely pretended that I was coming downstairs after a restless night, stretching and yawning as I did so.

“Hullo Lord Brightman,” I said, pretending to see him as if for the first time. Of the Arab, there was no sign. He had vanished like a shadow into the night. “Did I hear voices?” I asked.

“No,” he replied, “well, maybe I was muttering to myself.” I noticed that his eyes were regarding me warily. In order to maintain the charade, and so as to observe him more closely, I made a show of drinking coffee with him and talking of Mosul for another hour, despite my fatigue. He gave nothing away, and his word as a peer of the realm is beyond reproach, and eventually I was able to do nought but bid him goodnight. Sleep did not find me easily after that.

- Saturday 24th May, 1919 -

The next morning I took the opportunity to visit the bazaar, to stock up on cigarillos while Banksmith visited the messenger post. It was not quite the telegraph office that Brightman had promised, but if the messengers could be trusted then it would do. I had Banksmith write all of our messages in shorthand, to be safe.



As I was browsed the market, Jibrīl appeared behind me and muttered in his thick accent: "We are being followed. Be on your guard."

Jibrīl was like my shadow from that moment, as we wended our way through the bazaar, avoiding urchins and beggars and tenacious salesmen in our bid to get back to the party as quickly as possible. Twice I caught a glimpse of men in black robes with red tasselled scarves wrapped about their heads, seemingly intent on catching us, and yet Jibrīl pushed me onto a different path each time. The Tartar's name translated is 'Gabriel', and he indeed seemed like a guardian angel to me as we moved through the narrow streets of Al Qamishli.

Eventually, after some time spent hurrying through narrow streets, workyards and coffee-houses, Jibrīl bade me stop, confident that we had eluded our pursuers. And yet, as we picked up the road back to our lodgings, an old woman stepped out from a crowd of people, barring my path and placing a wrinkled hand on my chest. Her eyes were rheumy and her mouth toothless, and yet I was certain I knew her! Perhaps from my previous time here with King, although I could not place the woman fully.

Jibrīl seemed set to brush the woman aside, but she shot him a glare that made him think twice, before turning her attention to me.

"You should turn back now!" she said, her voice a rasp and her English broken. "Turn back or despair. You would seek to disturb that which must rest eternal. And if you succeed, only death awaits you. It will find you as it found your friend. Death!"

At this, Jibrīl decided that the woman was mad, and stepped forwards to see her off. As she backed away from the imposing Tartar, she pressed something into my hand. When the woman was gone, I turned over the small, metallic object. To my surprise it was a silver cuff-link. And it bore the initials L. W. K. — Leonard William King. From that moment on, I felt on edge in Al Qamishli. Eyes seemed to follow me wherever I went; danger seemed to beckon down every twisting rookery. Curtains twitched at upper windows as I passed. When I caught up with Banksmith later, he had a similar tale to tell, and my paranoia was vindicated.



Upon returning to the cantina, I found Lord Brightman in confabulation with Vervloet and Puncheon. The debate appeared to be heated for a moment, before Brightman won out, as he so often did. With our party was a group of strange-looking fellows — Arabs, I would guess — whom Brightman had apparently hired to accompany us on the final leg of our journey. He told me that several of his guides had had a change of heart, and wished to accompany him no longer, and so he had found the Arabs and trusted them to take up the mantle as guides.



The leader of the Arab group beheld me in a most disagreeable fashion, but all I could do was remind Lord Brightman that if his new servants compromised our mission it would be on his own head. All he did in return was remind me that I was leading the expedition at his behest, not the other way around.

- Sunday 25th May, 1919 -

It was with a sense of relief that we are preparing to leave Al Qamishli. I think I shall now be glad of slumber on the open trail, and shall not grumble again. I am seeing enemies everywhere, and my dreams are haunted by the pull of the Temple of Nabu, that long-unfinished quest to find treasures unknown. And yet that familiar dream has become usurped now by nightmares — of grinning Arabs and knives in the dark.

Though my trust in Lord Brightman is fraying, there is at least safety in numbers. Our party now counts at 31, with accompanying pack animals. Even in the turbulent district ahead, it would be a hardy or foolish marauder who would seek to rob us, for we look almost like a warband ourselves!

- Addendum, same day, 10 p.m. -

To-night we chanced upon a campsite not far from the Turkish-Syrian border, upon the fringe of that vast plain bounded by the Euphrates to the east and the Tigris to the west. This region is renowned for its militants, with the Mamluk Turks aggrieved at the secession of their long-held lands to European rule. Our guides warned us to be on our guard, for the encampment belonged to a large band of Kurds, whom we had not expected to encounter.

Indeed, upon approaching, we saw at once that several of the men within the encampment were armed, and wore clothing akin to uniforms. They greeted us cordially, and claimed to be merchants, although they were almost certainly bandits. The men seemed to bear us no ill will, and welcomed us into their camp, fascinated by the sight of several Europeans in such a far-flung place. We were quickly introduced to the Pasha, who informed us that his people were en route to Mezraa whence we had come. Whatever his political affiliations, the Pasha really is a fine fellow, and he invited us to join his camp for the night, offering up a large gaily coloured tent for our use. We have been invited to join the Kurds for their evening meal, which will indeed help preserve our rations.

- Monday 26th May, 1919 -

I am now regretting our decision to join with the Kurdish caravan, for we seem to have intruded upon some prosperous or holy festival for these displaced people. The Pasha and his attendants have been engaged in some uproarious celebrations for many hours now, with no sign of stopping. Their ceaseless mirth chased the sleep from my eyes, and I lay tossing about on my mattress in vain for hours. At length they broke out into a song, the burden of which, as far as I can recollect, was "Chimbel bam, chimbel bam." Perhaps it was a comic song, for after each refrain I could hear shouts of laughter. I covered my ears in desperation, but the sound always crept in. Even when the singers were silent, the echo of that strain rang in my hearing still.

As I dozed off at last, it was too an uneasy slumber, as "Chimbel bam, chimbel bam" haunted my dreams. It appeared almost to change from a sound to a form, and to bestride me like a nightmare. I could not account for it then, and can hardly do so now, but the first words I found myself repeating this morning when I awoke were: "Chimbel bam".



- Thursday 29th May, 1919 -

When finally we reached Mosul, and saw at last those ancient lands stretched before us, it seemed as though a great weight had been lifted from us. The journey across the seemingly endless plains and arid hills of Turkey had drained us, and now finally we saw the purpose of our expedition revealed.

We were almost a full day behind schedule, and it was with no small difficulty that I managed to locate my trusted man, Ahmed Abdel-Wahid, at the old dig site at the Mound of Nebu Yunus. This was now my turn to keep secrets from Lord Brightman, as I had kept Ahmed on a retainer since Leonard and I had excavated the mound. Since '03, Ahmed had been in constant contact with me, and — having some considerable influence over the locals — had been instrumental in keeping the location of the Temple of Nabu a secret from any who followed in my footsteps.

Ahmed had also, he informed me, paved the way for our expedition to begin work unmolested by local officials. He had with him a letter bearing the seal of the Governor of Baghdad, naming myself and Brightman as having sole permission to remove artefacts for scientific study, and to dig in the area for the following three weeks. I hoped, given that our target this time was rather more accurate than previously, that such a period of time would prove unnecessary. Ahmed also had with him six burly workers, who were ready to begin clearing the path to the temple just as soon as I gave the word.

With preparations made, I must go now to meet with my colleagues. It is time, at last, to inform them exactly what we are here to do.



- Addendum, same day, 11:30 p.m. -

There was, naturally, much excitement among our camp. Only three of us — Brightman, Puncheon and I — had known that the location of the Temple of Nabu was a certainty. It was clear that Vervloet had expected as much, but even he seemed to be in more agreeable spirits following the revelation. It was all I could do to stop the entire party marching off at once to see the temple for themselves, but I assured them that there was still much excavating to be done, and it would be best to do it by daylight, refreshed after a night's rest. We broke open the Tokay that we had been saving since Constantinople, and made merry despite the disparaging glances of the Arabs in our caravan.

When eventually everyone went to bed, I found myself unusually restless. I dreamt of a tall, bronze-skinned figure, neither male nor female, who called to me from the moonlit desert. I felt compelled to follow, whereupon I was led to the entrance of the Temple of Nabu, fully excavated and lit by braziers, much as it would have been in the time of Sargon. The figure vanished before the entrance, as if he had been made of shadow, now sucked back through the cracks in the massive golden doors. I placed my hand against the bas-relief, and felt the doors vibrate, and then I heard the most terrible sound, like the snorting and stomping of some immense bullock.



The sound grew so loud, and the vibrations of the door so violent, that I feared something was about to break through at any moment.

Then suddenly all went silent; the braziers guttered and went out, and a fell voice whispered in my ear: "Release him". I awoke at once, in a cold sweat, and could sleep no more. And so I left the tent and went for a walk towards the mound to clear my head. There I met Willard Puncheon, who stood and gazed into the darkness, in the direction of where I knew the temple to lie.

"I had the most peculiar dream," he said to me, absently. I did not know what to say, but I shuddered at the remembrance of my own nightmare. "There's something very ancient in that temple," he went on, "and I should think it doesn't want us digging it up." He turned away abruptly, and with no further word went back to his tent, leaving me to stare where he had been staring for a while. And I believe, deep down, that he was wrong. Whatever lies in the Temple of Nabu wants to be recovered. And it is our destiny to grant its wish.

- Friday 30th May, 1919 -

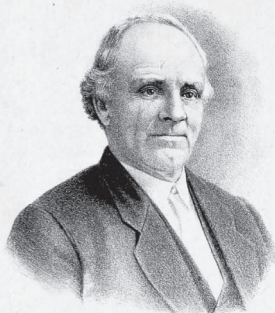
To-day begins the real work of excavating the Temple of Nabu. We have also the task of opening the Royal Library, though I feel sure that the real treasures will be discovered in the temple. To begin the official account, I shall list the members of the expedition:-



Myself, Reginald Campbell Thompson



Hon. Lord Howard Brightman



Prof. Willard Puncheon



Dr. Edward Mulgrave



Dr. Terence MacAvoy



Jack Pritchard



Peter Simpkins



Thomas Banksmith



Prof. Xavier Vervloet



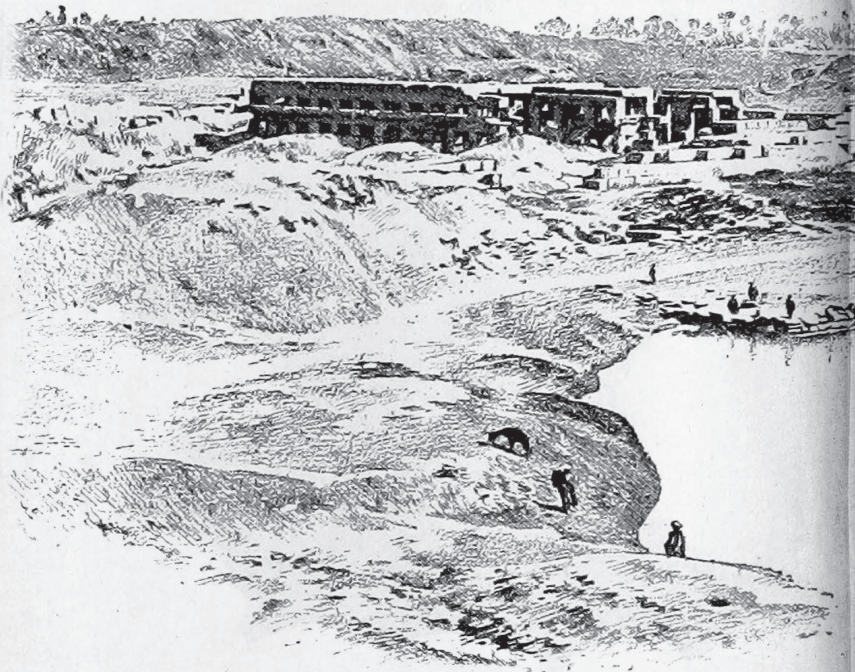
Tuomas Mertens

We are assisted in the matter by a local professional, Ahmed Abdel-Wahid and his party of twelve diggers, plus our own hired hands from north of the border, numbering some twenty-seven servants, diggers and guides in all. I have worked with Ahmed once before, and found him to be a good and honest man, of great mirth and greater integrity. His aid in enlisting further help should it be needed shall be invaluable. We have supplies enough for four weeks, with Mosul on our doorstep, and expect the work to take no more than two or three weeks.

I go now to meet the others and begin work.

- Addendum, same day -

With the noonday sun at its height, we have retired to find some shade. After much toil, we have made great progress. The upper portion of the doors have been uncovered, and a scaffold erected. Part of a great stone tablet has already been unearthed next to the doors, and although eroded we have clearly found the words ...Where slumbers the great god, Nabu, under the gaze of... Though that is all we can make out at present.



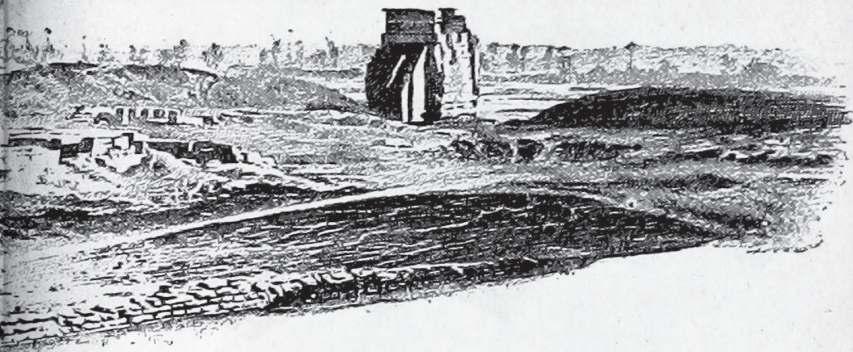
- Second addendum, same day -

I walked with Banksmith and Puncheon to the village at Nebu Yunus, promising to avail Puncheon of some of the local delicacies. It being a Friday, however, few people were at their places of work, instead indoors worshipping, or at the mosque. A few intrepid locals had manned their meagre stalls as word had escaped that there were Europeans in town who were not respectful of the Mosselman holy day. I managed to find a street vendor selling curried lamb, the smell of which made my mouth water, but the appearance seemed most unappetising to Puncheon.

We hadn't been there more than half an hour when an awful commotion struck up ahead of us. In a great cloud of dust, four Arabs rode up to us on their small horses, one of which reared up before us. Unless my mind was playing tricks, they all wore the black robes and red tasselled headscarves that I had glimpsed back in Al Qamishli, and the sight of it made my blood run cold. Jibril was by our side in a trice, yataghan drawn, wearing an expression that itself vowed his blade would taste blood. The four Arabs paid no heed, and their leader looked directly at me with a haughty expression on his face.

"You come here to plunder our lands, to rob us of our history!" he accused me.

I held out my hands in protest and tried to calm him and explain our scholarly mission, but he would hear none of it.



"Pah! What you seek will be the ruin of us all. I am one of many who seek to keep the past asleep and undisturbed."

"I do not understand," I said. "We are but scholars from England, come to examine the Mound of Nebu Yunus like many before us. We do not intend to disturb anything."

"Liar!" he snarled, his horse straining beneath his control as it sensed his anger. "You are here to open the Temple of Nabu. In doing so, you risk unleashing a great evil across the land; an evil that has slumbered beneath our watchful eyes for thousands of years. If you remove a single artefact from that tomb, you will bring down a curse upon yourself. All who touch the treasures of Nabu will suffer and perish!"

At this, Jibril stepped forth, drawing his pistol and aiming it at the Arab. "The only one who will perish to-day, brother, is you," he said, in his mother tongue. "Are you prepared to meet Allah to-day?" The Arab leader spat on the ground between them and said: "It is not Allah you should fear, 'brother'. You should leave these fools while you still can. As soon as they lay a hand on those treasures, their fate is sealed." He wheeled his horse around and the others followed suit, riding away at once. But before he was out of earshot he shouted back to me: "The dead shall have their revenge!" Willard Puncheon looked at me, his face pale. And I returned the look, for I understood as well as he did. Those last words had been shouted in Sumerian.

- Addendum, same day -

It was difficult to keep our minds on the task at hand for the remainder of the day, but I fortified myself with a sniff of scotch, and eventually managed to swear Puncheon to secrecy. Banksmith offered no protestations, and seeing the fibre of the man eventually got Puncheon to agree not to say a word to the others. By the time we'd returned to the dig site, I had almost managed to convince myself that our encounter was down to little more than superstitious hokum. Even so, for the remainder of the day's work, I kept my pistol with me at all times, and shall sleep to-night with it beneath my pillow.

- Saturday 31st May, 1919 -

There has hardly been time to stop and record our progress today, but now I am able to take some shade for a while and do so. The doors are half-cleared already, and are flanked by marvellous statues. The structure of the temple seems remarkably intact, and I believe we will indeed be able to enter it before the day is through. It is my great hope that the interior of the temple is as well-preserved as the exterior — if the mound that covers this once-great structure has intruded upon the roof, then the temple could be filled with dust and rubble, which will take many weeks to pick through. However, these initial signs are most encouraging, and I live in hope that we stand on the cusp of a great discovery.

- Addendum, same day, 10:40 p.m. -

What I have to write is so fantastical, so horrific and yet amazing, that I barely know where to start. I shall strive to record the facts in the order that they occurred, although should anyone read this journal but those who were directly involved, they would surely believe me insane. We worked until the light began to fail, and then we had large oil-lamps and reflectors brought up so that we might continue. The diggers were, after all, making great progress, and we were so close to clearing the doors that Lord Brightman would not hear of quitting the day. And so we continued moving earth and rubble, cleaning the bas-reliefs around the massive doors, digging out a path so that we might better move in our equipment, and so on.



When at last the entranceway was completely clear, it took the six diggers, plus four servants and even four of us to move the doors, pulling at ropes to heave open the magnificent portal that had stood shut so steadfastly for millennia. As the doors creaked open, there came the most foul wind from within, which rather took us by surprise. The noise it made, and the stench that accompanied it, was enough to send the Arab and Turkish servants

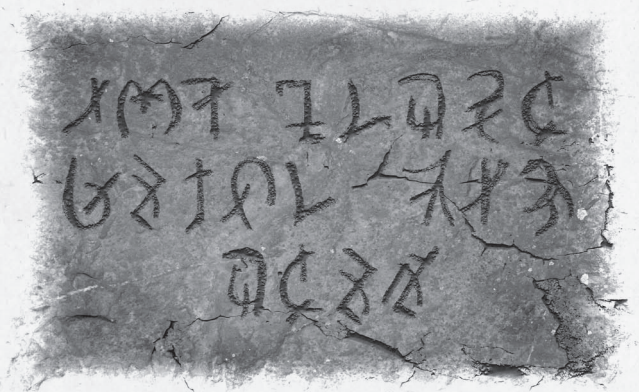
workers running in fear. The Turks, to their credit, stopped a safe distance away and were eventually coaxed back to work, but the Arabs retreated as far as they could. I sent Jibril to bring them back, but they would not listen to him, not to bribes or kind words or threats either, and so we all were left to get our hands dirty and finish the job ourselves.

Behind the doors was a short antechamber, leading to another portal. This one was covered with a great stone seal, bearing the familiar carvings of Nabu and Marduk, and some other curious sigils and drawings that we did not recognise. Before it were set many hundreds of candles, votive offerings that had long burned down to nothingness and now littered the entrance to the temple. The seal was rolled out of the way with no small effort, taking five of us to budge it, and then finally we were able to descend a short flight of steps into a great chamber, which offered up a view of such perfectly preserved history that it quite took our breaths away.



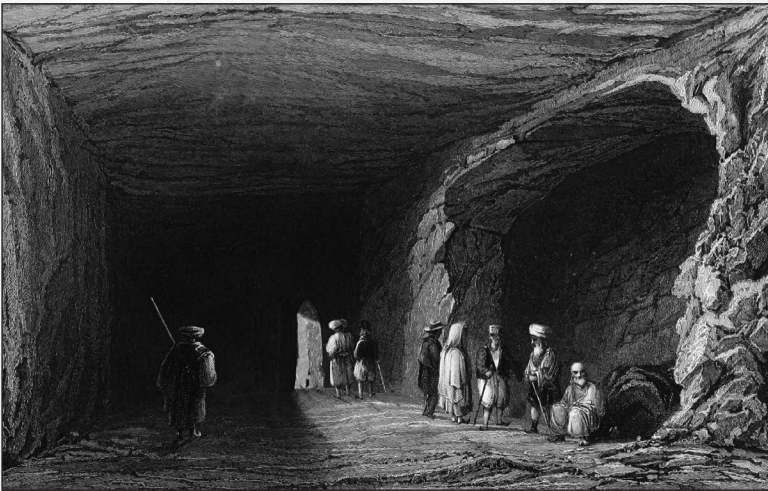
Three doorways on the western side of this chamber, similar to those on the eastern, led into as many distinct rooms, unconnected with each other. There were thus three magnificent portals, one behind the other, each formed by winged bulls facing the same way, and all looking towards the great hall; the largest colossi, those in front, being above 18 feet high, and the smallest, those leading into the inner chamber, about 12. It would be difficult to conceive any interior architectural arrangement more imposing than this triple group of gigantic forms, as seen in perspective by those who stood in the centre of the hall, dimly lit by our primitive torches, and harmoniously coloured or overlaid, like the cherubim in the temple of Solomon, with gold. At the upper ends of the two parallel chambers just described, were entrances opening into a room 82 feet by 24, whose walls were of the same unsculptured limestone. We all stopped agape as our light — surely the first illumination the room had seen since it was sealed long ago — danced upon the colourful paintings all around the chamber. Like a maddening mural, colours barely faded with age, it seemed to depict the realm of the gods themselves in detail never before seen, and certainly inspired by no place on Earth. In these images, black rivers flowed through red sands, twisting impossibly between tall black towers, like gigantic termite mounds wrought with a geometric precision beyond the abilities of Mother Nature. The rivers appeared to move as our torch-light danced

across the mural, writhing like great snakes before our very eyes, never seeming to flow in the same direction upon a second or third inspection. In the many-coloured sky of this alien vista, the faces of the gods, both familiar and hitherto unknown, were reflected in the strange constellations, as seven suns blazed above the crimson deserts. At the head of the chamber, a terrifying rendering of Nabu himself towered over the doorway leading from the room. This version of Nabu was twisted and serpentine, with only a few features familiar to our scholarly eyes, and dozens of pairs of arms stretching out from his torso like those ancient gods of the Hindoo cults. Beneath his feet, strange lettering was carved into the limestone wall, not in cuneiform at all, but in a script more akin to the Enochian text of John Dee, or perhaps that rumoured ritual language of the ancients that some call Aklo. Nabu stood between two iridescent spheres, beautifully wrought such that they seemed almost three-dimensional, their crystalline surfaces reflecting those baleful seven suns like gigantic diamonds. Where the two spheres touched, a swirling vortex opened, appearing much like the 'black holes' chronicled by modern astronomers, but never seen by the eyes of the ancient Assyrians. From this vortex, a bridge of shimmering gold leaf stretched down to Nabu himself, and a crude rendering of his chariot rode the path to its master. This entire mural stretched across every wall, telling a story on a maddening and dizzying scale.



From this imposing chamber, sited beneath the feet of the Nabu image and the strange script, a portal formed of sculptured winged lions led to the inner sanctum of the temple, which was curiously sealed by double doors of heavy stone, some ten feet high. These were covered from top to bottom with small figures, most elaborately carved, and designed with great spirit. Although bearing a general resemblance to the bas-reliefs of Kouyunjik, there was sufficient differences in the style of art and in the details, to show that they were not of exactly the same period, but perhaps older still. The three slabs to the right of the winged lions were occupied by a highly curious representation of a battle. The subject was incomplete, and could not be restored; and from the number of figures introduced, and the complicated nature of the action, it is difficult to describe these important bas-reliefs intelligibly. The key participants appeared to be the gods themselves, battling against the demon 'Alû'. Most

curious of all, Nabu himself was caught in the centre of this battle. Much of the relief had worn away, but we all presumed that Nabu, in his wisdom, was trying to bring peace to both sides. By now, our remaining diggers had had the chance to examine the chambers thus far, and had clearly not liked what they had seen. They began to mutter low oaths and prayers, and had to be instructed several times to bring up the light, lest they loiter near the entrance to the temple, being no use to anyone. Something of the many friezes and bas-reliefs had evidently caused them to come out in an awful funk, and no amount of cajoling would get them to help us with the heavy doors. Instead, I turned to Ahmed, Banksmith and Jibrīl, them being the stoutest of our party along with Vervloet's man, Mertens. They heaved, huffed and puffed against the stone doors, but they would not budge. We brought up rams made of the bough of a tree, and large crow-bars of iron, and this time Lord Brightman stepped up to help, with Mulgrave and Simpkins lending their strength. We toiled until the sweat poured from our brows in rivulets. At last, the door began to give, and encouraged by this sight, Vervloet began to shout excitedly at Mertens in Dutch. Mertens seemed to redouble his efforts, pushing at the right-hand door with all his might as the rest of us prised it open with our crow-bars. With a sudden release, the door slid open, and from the black void beyond it came a fearful wind as before, which caused most of the torches to gutter and go out. In the momentary darkness, we all heard a piteous scream.



Lights were struck up at once, the resourceful Willard Puncheon lighting an oil lantern to protect against the unstable draughts. In the amber light, we saw a scene of confusion. The remaining diggers had fled, naturally, given their nervous disposition. Our eyes were drawn, however, to Mertens, for we realised at once that he was the source of the scream. The man was clutching his face and groaning in agony. His clothes were covered in a fine white powder, as was most of the ground before the heavy doors. Banksmith was rubbing furiously at his arms, which were also covered in the powder, though he made little complaint.

“By God — it must be lye!” exclaimed Puncheon; and we saw at once that he was right. The exhalation of ancient air from that dark temple-room beyond had drawn forth deposits of the caustic powder, and Mertens had borne the brunt of the poisonous wind. We helped the man to his feet at once. MacAvoy, having some medical training, led Mertens away, and Vervloet reluctantly assisted him, recognising his bonds of fellowship to his countryman and servant, although not wanting to miss out on the discoveries that surely lay ahead.

Cautiously, then, the remainder of us entered the inner sanctum of the temple, mufflers drawn around our faces and hats pulled low, in case the same terrible event should befall us. And yet what we saw inside the sealed chamber was surely more terrible still. To describe the room in mundane terms first may go some small way toward mitigating the madness that followed. The room was a near-perfect square, being some 18 feet in all directions, save for a dome in the dead centre of the ceiling which made the chamber perhaps 22 feet at its apex. Four sturdy pillars, one in each corner, supported the stone ceiling. A circular dais of hard granite some 10 feet in diameter adorned the middle of the room, and at its centre, directly beneath the convex dome, was the altar. This cube of stone was adorned with pictographs and honorifics to Nabu cast of solid gold. Around its edge stood three artefacts, which in truth were the first things any of us had noticed upon entering, before our eyes were drawn elsewhere. The first of the artefacts was a small wooden chest, blackened with age yet traced with exquisite carvings. Next to it, upon a small wooden stand, was a scrimshawed bull’s horn, with gold filigree adorning it at either end. The third artefact was a small, golden statuette, whose silhouette was obviously that of Nabu. There were other artefacts within the chamber, but we did not discover them until afterwards — after Simpkins noticed the more gruesome occupants of the temple.

Simpkins’s stifled cry alerted us to something awful at once, and all seven of us noticed at the same time, tearing our eyes away from the wondrous treasures of the altar, and becoming aware of our surroundings as one. In the shadows around the raised dais were seven kneeling figures, heads touching the floor and hands before them, as though praying to Mecca, though all were kneeling in supplication to the altar of Nabu.



In their musty black robes they were almost unnoticeable at first, but now we saw them in the torchlight we all recoiled at the sight. Due to their positioning and the extent of their heavy robes, we could not see an inch of flesh on the wretches, and their clothing was in uncommonly good condition given how long they must have been there, but it was an extraordinary discovery. For a temple to be sealed in such a manner as this one was almost unheard of. For priests to be entombed within was against everything we had come to know about the Assyrian religious system. This, after all, was not Egypt, with its culture of mummification and premature burial of animals of slaves.

In the middle of the altar itself was another mummified figure, his hands clutched around an ornate dagger thrust into its own belly. Placed upon his chest was a seal of sorts, a clay tablet carved with strange sigils.

We were awestruck by this discovery — the magnitude of the find amongst the academic community would be immeasurable. As we stood there gawping, Vervloet came back into the chamber, decrying that Mertens was in a bad way, and even more upset with us for not waiting for him before plunging on into the temple proper. The Belgian seemed at once struck with a sort of gold-fever when his eyes fell upon the altar and, not even noticing the rest of us and our preoccupation with the ghastly figures all around us, he marched straight onto the dais and at once laid hands upon the bull's horn.

As soon as he did so, the atmosphere in the chamber changed. The shadows around us seemed to... thicken somehow, our lights suddenly seeming singularly inadequate. At once we heard a strange mumbling sound, as of several voices chattering low and strangely, in a tongue unfamiliar to our ears. It became a drone, intensifying gradually in volume as new voices added to the strange throng, until we all at once knew that it was coming from but one source — the long-dead priests. All of us backed away at once, Vervloet still clutching the gilded horn to his chest, and we watched in horror as the priests whom we had presumed dead began to move. They trembled at first, then raised themselves slowly from their praying position, their bones cracking as they snapped to horrific life. The priests all were impossibly ancient, but alive. Their emaciated, parchment-thin skin should not by rights have contained any vital bodily functions, but the skeletal forms jerked upright, staggering and twitching to their feet, powder-dry croaks issuing forth from throats unable to speak, milky eyes staring at us from deep black sockets. Their headdresses, though aged and filth-encrusted, were bright scarlet, and I knew at once that these priests belonged to the same mysterious order as the Arabs who had accosted us in the market yesterday.

Not one of us knew what to do. Simpkins and Pritchard ran. Mulgrave cried out in abject terror. All of us who were able to move our limbs did so in our bid to escape the hideous things that stumbled after us. Vervloet was slowest to act; he stood gibbering, clutching the bull's horn, as the first of the priests reached him. A shot rang out, deafening in the stone

chamber, and a bullet from Lord Brightman's pistol struck Vervloet's unnatural assailant in the forehead. The creature staggered back, but did not fall, until another shot found its mark. Vervloet shrieked, but the dead-priest fell and moved no more.

Encouraged by this, Banksmith drew his pistol, and similarly began to fire upon the shambling things. Some refused to fall, others dropped more easily, as if thankful for finding final rest after so long held in the purgatory of dark magics. For those that would not succumb to death by the gun, they were soon to find release by the sword, as Jibril raced into the chamber, pushing me aside and setting about decapitating each of them with his yataghan.

And then, oh horror! Jibril himself met his end. As he struck the head from the neck of the final priest, one of those that had lain prone on the ground, seemingly slain by Banksmith's pistol, sprung suddenly to life, pulling itself upright upon the great Tartar and sinking its yellowed teeth into his throat. Even as the blood gushed from him, Jibril did not cry out, but instead tore the thing from him and snapped its twig-dry neck with his bare hands. The pair of them, man and blasphemous thing, fell to the floor of the temple in a heap.

Those of us who remained quickly pulled Jibril from the chamber, but it was already apparent that he was done for. Brightman looked grave indeed, and enlisted Banksmith at once to help him burn the bodies of the un-dead priests. Not one of us could bear to be in the temple when the matches were struck, and so we dragged Jibril's body with us, and retreated to the evening air, where the sight of the familiar stars and moon, even above this strange land could at least reassure us that we were alive, and still perhaps sane.



- Sunday 1st June, 1919 -

To-day the weather has turned, and is unbearably hot. Perhaps this can explain the terrible nightmares that plagued me last night, and made me lack for sleep. I fear, however, that the source of those nightmares was simply the dreadful things that I saw yesterday.

Memory of the dreams has faded with the coming of the day, but I still awoke with the dreadful sense that something was stalking me, waiting for me outside my tent, ready to pounce. One of the nightmares stayed with me, and I scribbled it down as best I could, so that I may recount it here. In this dream it seemed to me that there were thunderings in heaven and quaking upon earth, and a being with an awful visage, and nails like an eagle's

talons, gripping me and carrying me off, before dropping me beside the golden doors of the Temple of Nabu and forcing me to go down into the dark abyss. Whispers filled the black air, which I could not understand, and yet understood perfectly. They told the tale of “He who once went in and never came out; who travelled along that road and never returned — he who dwelleth within is without light, the beings therein eat dust and feed upon mud; they see no light, and they live in the darkness of night.”

In the first chamber, by the light of a dozen braziers, I saw twisted creatures who had been kings when they lived upon the earth, and shadowy beings offering roasted meat to Anu and Enlil, and cool drinks poured out from waterskins. In this House of Dust dwelt high priests, ministrants, the magician and the prophet, and the deities Etana, Sumukan, Eresh-kigal, Queen of the Earth, and Bêlitsêri, who registered the deeds done upon the earth. Their offerings all were aimed towards a statue of Nabu, who alone amongst these celestial beings was not present, and yet watched, from some place far away.



The only detail I can recall is that I was being chased through the pitch-dark halls of the temple, chased by something large and bestial and impossibly ancient. I recall ensconcing myself within the inner chamber, in which a shaft of light shone down from the dome in the ceiling, illuminating not the altar, but a series of small stone tablets. A figure stood next to the altar, shrouded in darkness, and swept a shadowy arm over the tablets. The figure's voice whispered in my mind, dispensing with the inconvenience of conventional speech and hearing altogether. It said simply: “He waits.” That was all I could recall, though the feeling of true fear that I had within the dream stayed with me long afterwards.

I met most of the others at breakfast, and it was difficult, in the light of day, to even speak of what we saw, for it seemed so ludicrous, so unbelievable, that even we who had experienced it were at a loss for words. Half the diggers had fled in the night, gone back to their homes in whatever corner of this God-forsaken desert they came from. Ahmed's men remained still, thank heavens, for we will surely be in dire need of their aid in the coming days and weeks. It was they that buried Jibril last night, in the manner of his people. I fear the Tartar's strength shall be much missed.

Simpkins, Puncheon and MacAvoy, it seems, talked last night after the rest of us had gone to bed in silence. They have a theory that the noxious fumes so long trapped in the temple had gone to our heads, causing a sort of mass hallucination. The priests were certainly real, but all it would have taken, they argued, is for one of us to imagine that the dead had come back to life — perhaps seeing a twitch caused by some insect or trick of the light — and the hallucination would have become contagious. None of us, I think, truly believed that, but it made us feel better that there may be a rational explanation. It made us feel better just to be rational about it! Dr. MacAvoy reported that Tuomas Mertens was in a poor state, his eyes damaged and his face scarred, such that he may not recover. The poor man was blinded by the lye, and it struck us all numb to think that it could have been any of us.

At the mention of Mertens, we suddenly realised that Vervloet was not with us. After questioning the servants, we learned that Vervloet had returned to the temple at first light, unaccompanied. Whatever had possessed him to return there was beyond me, but the Belgian, by his folly, had given us reason to return, and so we did.

We found Vervloet in the inner sanctum, putting the holy fear into three quailing servants, who held a light for the Belgian while he scabbled around the chamber looking at the various scattered artefacts. He had evidently made a good start, for he seemed fascinated by a set of tablets in particular, and was muttering something to himself, which we took to be his interpretation of the cuneiform on the tablets, translated into his native Dutch. All the while, Vervloet held the horn close to his chest; he had removed it from the temple the previous night, and then retired at once — had he kept it on his person all night? We could only assume so. That he had had as little sleep as me was obvious — he looked haggard and wild-eyed, his usually perfectly manicured beard and hair a mess.

When finally he noticed us, Vervloet set about describing to us all the artefacts he had found, most excitedly, and postulating as to their form and function. When he came in turn to the wooden casket atop the altar, he held the horn beneath one arm — unwilling still to relieve his hold on it — and opened the little casket with his other hand. Inside were two fragile-looking scrolls, which Vervloet proceeded to handle with barely a care, the ancient parchment crumbling in places at his touch. At the sight of this carelessness, the normally timid Willard Puncheon flew into a rage, and rushed at Vervloet directly. Pushing the Belgian

aside, he gently put the parchment scrolls back into the casket and carried them off, cradling them just as the Belgian cradled the horn, each professor treating his favoured artefact like a long-lost child.

Seeing this all unfold, Lord Brightman stood beside me and whispered that we ought to begin cataloguing and removing the various artefacts at once, before frayed tempers and jangling nerves got the better of our party. Determining that a bit of academic work would indeed prove just the tonic for the party, I relayed the suggestion to the others, and we set about the unenviable task of clearing out that dreadful place. However, before we moved in more lights and tools, I had a quiet word with Banksmith, who at once rounded up some men of tougher fortitude to clear out the ashes and burnt bones of those half-mummified priests. If we could only make the chamber look like a normal archaeological excavation, we may yet persuade some of the locals to replace the absconded diggers.



- Addendum, same day -

We have left the temple for the day, having made great progress despite our misgivings about the place. We have acquired a goodly number of artefacts from the temple, most notably from the inner chamber, the most important of which I have catalogued separately to this journal

for posterity. These six artefacts make up, insofar as we can tell, the fabled "Elements of Release".

Of these six, the item of especial note must be the golden statue that adorned the altar of Nabu. When eventually a study was made of this remarkable artefact, we found it to be made of solid gold — an item of almost incalculable value. However, there was something so strange about the statuette that we did not so examine it for some time. The statuette itself is a twisted image of Nabu being somehow 'born' from the body of another man, possibly a king. I have described the appearance of the thing in my catalogue notes, but that is not what struck us as so strange.

Every one of our party was inexplicably reluctant to touch the statuette. It alone, for instance, was the only one of the artefacts in that chamber not pawed at by Vervloet in his gold-lust. Not only that, but the statuette almost evaded scrutiny, as though it was always on the periphery of our vision somehow, as though it did not want to be seen. This, of course, sounds fantastical, but eventually, when enough of us were assembled in the inner sanctum, we could not help but turn to the statuette — the last artefact remaining. Three of us in turn tried to touch it, but we were struck by a tremendous feeling of unease, as though to lay hands on the idol would be the death of us.

I found that my hands trembled as I outstretched them, and when at last I did manage to touch the golden figure, I recoiled at once, for it felt greasy to the touch, putting in my mind such images of decay and fecundity that I felt my hands were soiled beyond redemption. It was Brightman who at last overcame his fear, cursing himself and all of us for fools, and snatching up the idol. He did not, I note, use his bare hands, but rather rolled it quickly in his jacket and carried it out of the temple at once, and with great haste.

To-night, Willard asked me when we plan to start excavating the Royal Library, as though he is eager to turn his back so soon on the very site that we have striven so hard to find. I cannot blame him. Though I must talk it over with Lord Brightman, I expect that to-morrow we shall attempt to open the library, and divert merely a skeleton crew to the temple to finish the work of transcribing the myriad carvings, tablets and wall-painting found therein. I do not doubt for a moment that Vervloet will lead the way, as it has been nigh impossible to get him to leave the inner sanctum, even after removing the artefacts. Something draws him to that chamber like a moth to a flame.

Ahmed has posted guards at the temple entrance, and the doors are sealed for now. I think several in our party would rather they stayed that way.

Catalogue of Artefacts from Temple Excavation, 1st June, 1919

Contained herein are details of the six principal artefacts, referred to in the cuneiform texts as the "Elements of Release", discovered in the Temple of Nabu at Nineveh.

The Horn of Alû

A bull's horn, set with precious gemstones and intricately carved with pictograms representing the Sumerian underworld. The artefact has been immaculately preserved through the centuries, and was found resting upon a small golden plinth before the altar of Nabu. Amongst the many artefacts within the temple, the horn was singularly out of place, being dedicated not to Nabu, but to Alû, a fearful demon of the underworld, offspring of the gods Anu and Antu.



The Scrolls of Endless Shadow

A set of two small scrolls, their contents written – or rather etched – onto thick parchment, and packed inside a simple wooden casket blackened with age. Simply unfurling and reading the fragile scrolls would have destroyed them, and so they have been entrusted to the possession of Professor Willard Puncheon, who shall study them further under clinical conditions in England.

The Seal of Nabu

This seal was placed on the chest of the unidentified mummy who was found upon the altar of Nabu. The seal is a disk of blue-glazed clay barely two-inches across (4.5 cm). It depicts a priest in prayer before the symbols of Nabu (a writing stylus and clay tablet).

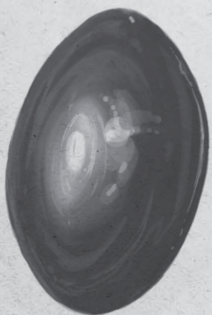


Statuette of "Nabu Incarnate"

The most singularly valuable item in the collection. It is approximately 8 inches high and made from pure gold. The statuette is cast in the shape of a bearded king who appears to be metamorphosing from a second, plainer humanoid figure. The effect is to suggest some form of divine conversion or god-like birth.



There are no marks or inscriptions save for a small sigil carved on the base, which looks like a rune of some kind: it is in no language known to the region, although Prof. Punccheon claims to have seen a similar text once before, and has identified the name "Yul'huthris", possibly another name for Nabu in this instance, though curiously synonymous with the ancient Greek name IOG-SOTOT. The remainder of the inscription is not of any form of writing that we can identify.



The Eye of Lamashtu

The "Eye of Lamashtu" is a cat's eye opal, of gem opal quality, ovoid in shape and 7 inches wide on its largest axis. The gem is of a dark hue, almost black in its darkest regions, but with a deep amber centre that can shift from bright yellow to dark brown, sometimes appearing to change size and shape depending on lighting conditions.

This gemstone has a curious tactile quality - everyone who has handled it has reported a strong sensation of warmth, with some saying that the gem vibrated in their hands much in the manner of a purring cat. This artefact requires further study into its geo-magnetic properties.

Clay Ritual Tablets

Another set of clay tablets, this time four in number, contained together in a heavy carved marble casket, which was slotted into a niche beneath Nabu's altar. The casket is approximately 20 inches by 14 inches by 12 inches, and is covered in ornate carvings and cuneiform inscriptions. Some of the carvings are not Assyrian in design, and suggest a relationship with an

older religion still, or perhaps some cult to Nabu that we have not previously discovered. The casket's fitted lid is easily removed, to reveal the four tablets within.



The tablets themselves are clearly split into two related pairs. Prof.

Puncheon reports that the pairs contain some forms of religious ceremony or magical ritual, one called "The Walking Darkness", the other "Blood and Light". More work is needed to translate the inscriptions, but the cuneiform at the head of each tablet is clear. It is a repeated line, reading simply: "A dire warning."



The largest of the strange sigils inscribed into the lid of the casket.

- Monday 2nd June, 1919 -

Again I awoke in the early hours of the morning, the frightful heat of the day perhaps contributing to the terrible nightmares that plagued me last night. This time the image stayed with long after I awoke; the fearful braying of the great ox-demon that chased me to the point of exhaustion in my fitful sleep rang in my ears. Its hoof-beats pounded in my skull even after I shook the last wisps of sleep from my fatigued body, until I felt sure that the dark creature of shadows would come tearing through the walls of my tent at any moment.

My heart pounded in my chest — I had spent the entire night, it seemed, being hunted through pitch-dark catacombs, emerging at last in that vile inner sanctum of the Temple of Nabu where, by dim firelight, the golden idol awaited me, except that it was now of prodigious size, writhing of its own volition, and standing before a swirling vortex of shadow. And behind me, the hooves, always.

- Addendum, same day -

I have read back my earlier entry, and it seems like I was indeed held in the grip of a fever-dream. As the hours have passed, so has my grip on reality returned — and yet this, in spite of the strange occurrence over breakfast this morning. I was not the only member of the party to look somewhat haggard this morning, and we all had a pretty fine time needling

each other over our outward appearance. Something was unspoken between us, however, and it was Mulgrave who was the first to say it openly — to speak of the nightmares. At once there was a hush around the dining-tent, and we continued our conversation in low tones, so as not to alarm the superstitious servants. Four of us — myself, Brightman, Puncheon and Mulgrave — all reported fitful sleep and harrowing nightmares last night. Worse still, some of the details of those nightmares, such that we chose to reveal to each other at least, bore striking similarities.

Mulgrave seemed to have it the worst, however — he told us that the invisible bull, which moved as a shadow through the temple, had caught him in the central chamber, and gored him to death, tearing out his vital organs with its massive horns while he watched! He described the sensation of the beast's cold, wet nose snuffling across his exposed flesh, its horns and tongue flicking through his blood-slick skin and into the soft organs beneath, while he had been deafened by the sound of his own screams. Though we all told him that it was all a trick of the mind, and that it's impossible to die in one's own dream, he turned frightful pale and told us flatly that he had seen his own death, and it was in a manner most unbecoming a gentleman.



After those early exchanges, I retired to my tent for a short while to gather myself. I knew that, as the leader of the expedition, I had to be seen to be unrattled by these strange occurrences, and so shortly thereafter I sought out Lord Brightman and said as much to him. With a brief talk about “stiff upper lip”, we put on a united front and went to address the troops. However, I must add that Lord Brightman was most unwilling to have our conversation in his own tent — I believe he is still in possession of the statuette of Nabu, and when things have calmed down a little I will have to ask him about that.

My next task was to meet with Banksmith. A sterling fellow as always, unshaken despite the bandages on his arms where the lye had burned him as he helped Mertens, and utterly disbelieving of the strange things we had all witnessed. How I wish I had such a doughty mind as Banksmith; to be untroubled by flights of imagination would be a blessing at this time. I placed Banksmith in charge of crating up all of the artefacts, tablets and sundry trinkets removed from the temple thus far, and sending them onwards to Tripoli.

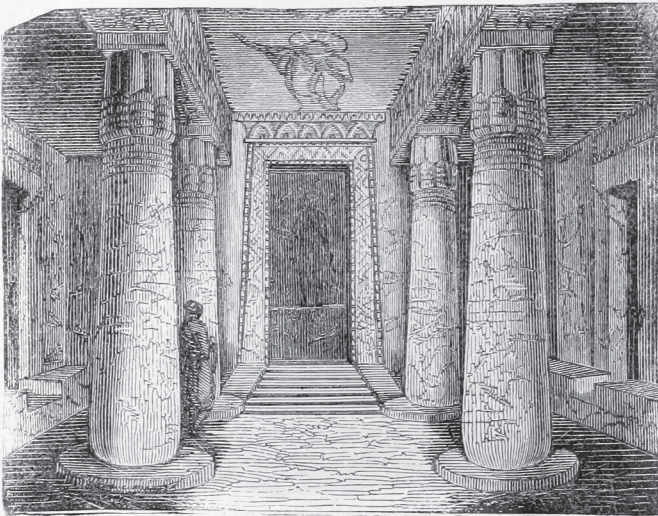
The first shipment, I instructed, should be sent to-day, and Banksmith avowed that it would be done. In truth, this task was assigned more quickly than I would normally have liked. The things that have already beset the party have made me wary — I want nothing more than to simply box up everything we find and ship it back to England for study, rather than spend a moment longer than necessary in this desert. More pragmatically still, the plight of poor Mertens gives me the perfect excuse to do this — by sending our injured man back home early, we are able to ship out several crates prematurely without raising too much suspicion from the authorities.

With all these preparations made, I steeled myself for one last day at the temple, for tomorrow I shall move on to the Royal Library and, I can only hope, plainer sailing.

- Some provisional notes on the excavation of the Temple of Nabu -

Another important monument was discovered to-day, which had previously been overlooked. Hidden behind a limestone wall in the first antechamber was a large inscription.

The inscription mentions twelve gods, and the same number of emblems, presumably corresponding to the twelve gods, are sculpted on the main columns that line the chamber.



But the important point is that not only does the number of emblems portrayed tally with the number of gods mentioned, but there are definite indications that the order of sequence is the same in both cases. Thus the crescent which obviously symbolises the moon-god occurs fifth, the same place occupied by Sin in the list of names. Again, the star, the undoubted emblem of Ishtar, similarly comes eleventh, the name of the goddess also being eleventh in the list. Lastly, the thunderbolt, which is the certain symbol of Adad, occupies the seventh place and corresponds with that occupied by the god in the inscription. These three coincidences can hardly be regarded as accidental, and it is reasonable to assign the remaining symbols to the corresponding gods in the list.

Following out this method we can provisionally assign the emblems as follows: Ashur, Anu and Bel are represented by horned hats; Ea by a column with a ram's head; Sin by a crescent; Shamash by a winged disc; Adad by a thunderbolt; Marduk by a column with a pine-apple termination; Nabu by a simple column; Ninib by a column surmounted by two lions' (or two bulls') heads; Ishtar by a star; and Igigi by seven dots. It hardly requires me to note that these deities, positioned so prominently in a temple dedicated to Nabu, are most unusual. That the inscriptions had been covered suggests that the temple is older than we had even imagined, and that it was perhaps rededicated to Nabu in the time of Sargon II.



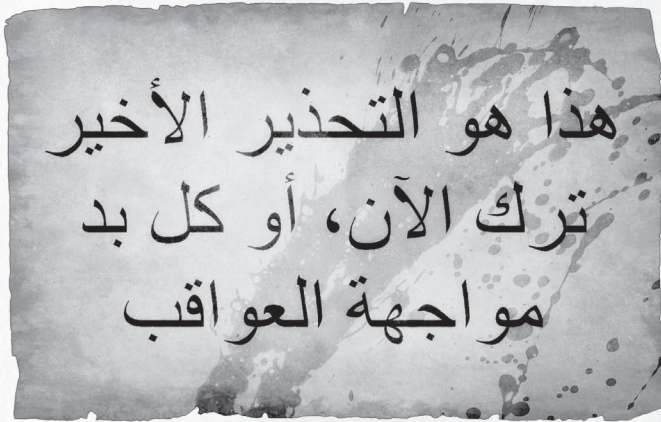
Marduk appears in this inscription as the principal deity of Babylon, holding the place that one would usually expect Ashur to occupy on the monuments of Nineveh. He is called "the great Lord," "Lord of Lords," "Elder of the Gods," &c. Nabu seems to hold the second rank.

- Addendum, same day, 9:40 p.m. -

Another terrible event has befallen our party! Oh, that we had come more prepared for the trials that plague us!

With little chance of any but Vervloet working after dark again, most of us repaired to the camp at 8 p.m., leaving the Belgian to his own devices, making rubbings of every inscription and poring over the horrid mural in the large chamber. As we brewed tea beside the campfire, we were interrupted by an anguished cry for help from one of the diggers. So agitated was he that we all raced to him at once, and Brightman with pistol drawn too.

When we reached the man, he directed us at once to the ruined wall that bounded the dig site. There, by the old gate, we found Dr. Mulgrave's body. By lantern-light we saw that he had been stabbed several times in the chest, the knife still protruding from his heart — the scene was gruesome, and MacAvoy stepped forward as our medical man only to confirm the obvious. More disturbingly, however, MacAvoy found that the ornate dagger that had killed Mulgrave also pinned a note to the poor man's chest, a scrap of bloodied paper with a simple warning scrawled upon it in Arabic: This is your last warning. Leave now, or all shall face the consequences.



To-night I have taken grave measures to protect our party. Lord Brightman agrees that there is too much at stake to leave now — those who seek to frighten us away doubtless want the treasure for themselves, and we cannot allow such riches to be snatched from the Empire's grasp. To this end I have written two letters to-night. One goes to General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, acting governor of Baghdad, outlining our plight. I fear we may have to begin shipment of any remaining finds south to Baghdad if the violence here escalates, and have informed General Maude of my intention. The second letter is to the British garrison at Tripoli, where even now the crates of artefacts from the temple are heading. I can only hope that they reach the Syrian city intact, where they will be placed into the safekeeping

of British troops. I have also requested military assistance if it can be spared, using my intelligence agency seal to lend the missive urgency. Ahmed has dispatched these letters for me using trusted messengers, and I can only pray that they find their recipients in good time.

As to the matter of Mulgrave; all we can do is prepare his mortal remains as best we can, and prepare to ship them home, like one of our unearthed treasures. The death of Mulgrave has cast a dark shadow over our morale, especially Pritchard, who has taken it worst of all. I am more determined than ever to divert our attentions to the library to-morrow, not only to keep us busy, but perhaps also to throw our enemy off the trail for a short time at least.

- Tuesday 3rd June, 1919 -

How long must I suffer these nightmares? I awoke at barely 3 in the morning, unable to tell whether I was asleep or awake. Perhaps I sleep still! For as I sat upright in my bed, rubbing at my belly to ensure that I had not — like poor Mulgrave before me — been gored by the monstrous shadow that hunts me night, I heard a commotion outside. The early morning silence was shattered as the tent was torn open with wicked-looking scimitars, and a dozen tan-skinned marauders marched inside. They dragged me bodily from my bed, and carried me to the temple.

Throwing me upon the altar, the soldiers held me down while a priest of Nabu stepped forth, carrying a huge bronze sword, with which he began to dismember me. Oh God! I can still feel the pain in my limbs from where he lopped them with that great sword. And just as Mulgrave had, I saw my own death, I felt the blade bite into my neck, and for a few moments before waking I watched the priests leave the room, and saw my own body twitching from where my head had fallen. Mulgrave died the very next night after dreaming of his death — am I to be next?

Finally assuring myself that I was awake at last, I left my tent to find water. As I did so, I heard voices coming from the edge of camp, and again I discovered Lord Brightman in secret conversation with an Arab who was unknown to me. This time, perhaps driven by paranoia at the string of horrid events that had befallen us, I did not seek to hide. Instead I marched towards the two men openly, announcing my presence at once. As Brightman turned to face



me, the mysterious Arab fled the scene, vanishing into the night. Maintaining as much etiquette as I could muster in the circumstances, I asked Lord Brightman outright who the other man was, and what they were doing at such an hour.

Brightman at once — and rather brusquely I might add — told me that he woken in the night with the terrible feeling that he needed to write home to his wife, and regretted having neglected to do so earlier. He told me he had penned a missive and sent for a messenger at once, and the man had rushed away because Brightman had promised him 100 dinars if he could catch up with the earlier dispatch and send the message that same day. The story felt rehearsed to my ear, but Brightman stared at me imperiously, his steely gaze defying me to challenge his word as a peer. Without further evidence, I cannot. But evidence I shall have.

At breakfast I was surprised to see Vervloet, for he had been elusive for days. I assumed that perhaps the death of Mulgrave had encouraged the Belgian to seek the company of civilised men, but I was soon to be corrected on that score. I stood to offer Vervloet a place at our table, but he muttered something in Dutch and walked past me as though I were not there, clutching a satchel to his chest tightly. I tried again to get through to him, asking him if he planned on joining us at the Royal Library dig to-day. He said nothing, only carried on shuffling from the tent, out into the morning sunlight, wide-eyed and detached-looking. Puncheon told me that Vervloet would undoubtedly be at the temple again, putting the fear of God into those diggers brave or foolhardy enough to accompany him. I resolved to have a word with Ahmed later, to ensure an armed guard remain at the temple all day. I had no desire to join Vervloet in the Temple of Nabu for all the tea in China, but I did not think it wise to leave any of our party alone.



- Addendum, same day -

In many respects, Vervloet's continued obsession with the temple has done us some small favour. With almost all of the artefacts now removed, the Belgian can do little damage. However, his continued presence in those dark, tomb-like chambers is attracting much

attention from the locals, who are so eager to see what “the mad one” is doing, that they are completely ignoring our work on the Royal Library entrance only 300 yards away. Our work was halted temporarily, however, when the owner of the mound beneath which certainly lay the library ruins came to us with many protestations. He had leased us the site, he claimed, not knowing the extent of our work, and needed to set out his flock to graze as soon as possible. The man was only placated when Brightman paid him for an additional month, and promised that we would be gone in half that time.

By the time the working day was done, we were all thoroughly exhausted, and yet we managed to make one significant discovery. A great stone seal of Nabu was found buried beneath the earth, forming part of a wide, broken path. This confirmed that we were digging in the right place, and that our guess as to the exact location of the library entrance had been correct. To-morrow, work will surely be quicker, as we know exactly what we are looking for and where.



- Addendum, same day, midnight -

To-night I acted in a manner that I am partly ashamed of, driven to the actions of a sneak by the rigours of circumstance. I am also hesitant to admit that I made Banksmith complicit in my activities, though perhaps the result will vindicate us both.

Given Lord Brightman's obvious deception in the early hours of this morning, I set out to-night determined to find out exactly what he has been up to. I engaged Banksmith in creating a diversion for Brightman in the form of a card game, which is His Lordship's great vice. I loaned Banksmith sufficient funds to ensure that the game would continue for some time, and ensured that a servant was on hand with plenty of scotch for the evening's entertainment. I made my excuses early in the game and retired, assuring everyone that I would not stray far from the guard posts around the camp.

As soon as I was certain that everyone was engaged within the communal tent, I stole across to Brightman's tent and made a thorough search of his chest and travel-pack. I was doubly nervous, for the first instance discovery of my actions would cause such divisions in the camp as to make further work untenable. In the second instance, being alone in the camp late at night with enemies abroad was foolish, and gave me the most terrible jitters. I fumbled my way through Brightman's possessions, hardly able to concentrate on what I was seeing, when finally I chanced upon a bundle of letters. The topmost envelope bore the crude postmark of Al Qamishli, and it became apparent at once that the diversion to that town had always been on Brightman's agenda, for he had expected to receive a message there. With trembling finger, I took out the letter and read it. It went thusly:

My Lord,

As requested, I send word of the meeting with Mr. Delgado. I am able to report that Lord Bluffstone conducted the business satisfactorily, and that Mr. Delgado has agreed to meet your price for the Elements of Release. Both yourself and Lady Brightman will, by extension, be granted membership of Delgado's inner circle, with full honours, and all allowances therefore made for your immunity during the Ascension.

I must report, however, that Mr. Delgado appeared to my eyes to be a disreputable fellow, not to be trusted, and that your Lordship's great influence should be put to use in insuring yourself against any potential chicanery. In addition, Mr. Delgado seemed most well-informed about the Thompson expedition's movements, suggesting that he has eyes and ears even in the lands of the Ottomans. I urge you, my Lord, to be on your guard.

Your faithful servant,

Collins

That was the extent of the letter as best as I could remember — I do not know exactly what it means, but I am certain that Brightman plans to steal the artefacts for himself and sell them off upon our return! After reading the letter, my nerve finally broke. I replaced everything as I found it — at least as I remember finding it under duress — and returned to my own tent to write this entry and puzzle things out.

- Friday 6th June, 1919 -

I have gone for several days now with so little sleep that I am almost used to the feeling of maddening mental alertness and physical exhaustion that comes with it. At least there have

been no further incidents so far as I can tell, and I do not believe that Brightman suspects that I am onto him. Could it be that I was seeing conspiracy where none truly exists? Could it be that the threats we have faced so far were empty ones, served to us by an opportunistic murderer who has not the courage to confront men who are prepared for him? I can only hope so. There has been no word yet from the garrisons at either Baghdad or Tripoli, though I expect a reply any day now.

There has been little to note for several days. There was nothing more for it than to stick to our original plans, and set the diggers on clearing the entrance to the Royal Library. This we began as soon as possible, trying our best to stay cheerful and to let ourselves become absorbed in the work. Everyone got involved in the labour, even those not so inclined to manual work. Thankfully, we have managed to recruit additional workmen from the neighbouring villages, who seem not so superstitious as those from the immediate vicinity. The clearing of the library mound has thus become much easier.

After days of toil, the entrance to the library itself was eventually cleared. The work was backbreaking, and still more is required to gain access to the structure itself, assuming it is still intact beneath the mound that has long grown up around it. We have uncovered the path and the flanking statues that lead up to the door, and now all that remains is to uncover and break open the sealed doors themselves. As the workers cleared away the last of the rubble from the statues, the true magnificence of our discovery finally hit home, and we all became enthused with the work again, as we had been on the first day at the temple.

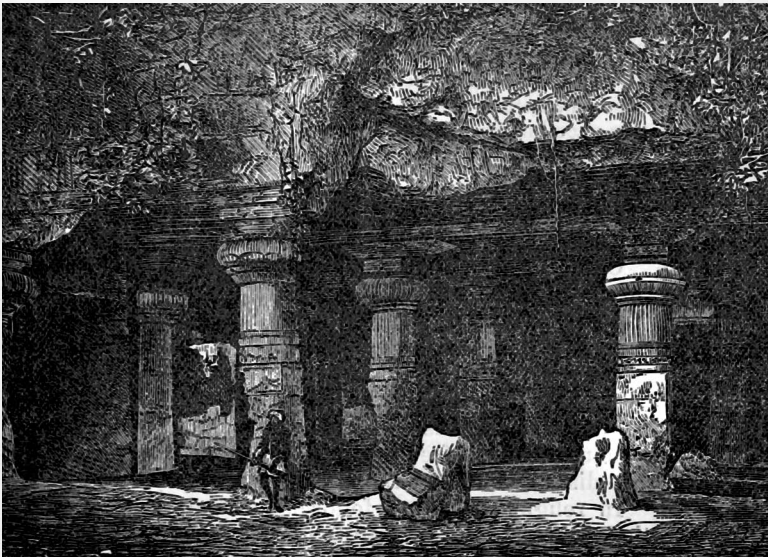


Who could have known how wondrous the library entrance still looked beneath the rocks and crude render?

- Addendum, same day -

Another day was almost past when the doors were reached, and it was with some trepidation when we saw that they were large, heavy and sealed shut, much like the ones at the temple. The workmen set about at once prising the doors open, and those of us in the party stepped backwards almost as one, instantly trepidatious that there would be further horrors to uncover within. It was a foolish thought, of course — the library was never intended to be a place of worship or sacrifice, and whatever blasphemous ritual had caused the Temple of Nabu to become so sullied over the centuries would unlikely have been replicated in this ancient seat of learning, the sister buildings of which had been excavated across Assyria by Victorian expeditions. And yet, if the library was still intact, if it was as pristine as the temple, and if its many halls wended their way far beneath the mound of dirt before us, who could know what lay within?

When the doors were finally opened and light sources carried within, it was naturally myself, Banksmith and Brightman who entered first. What we found was a structure in some state of ruin, filled with rubble where ceilings had collapsed and pillars had toppled to the floor. Any gilded treasures such that we had seen in the Temple of Nabu had long since been pillaged, undoubtedly before the library was sealed against the rigours of time once and for all. However, the intricate cuneiform carvings on the few exposed walls suggested that there would indeed be knowledge to be found upon a thorough search.



The primary chamber, which we had to virtually climb through, measured some 80 feet by 24 feet, and in its centre could be seen the top of the head and wings of a winged lion statue, the largest yet found on or near the site, though now buried almost completely. We so named

this entrance hall "the Chamber of the Lion", and we pressed on to see what else could be found. It was a similar story throughout — we found three passages leading off that great chamber, and dozens of doors leading from those, but the debris within was so extensive that almost every path was blocked completely. It will likely take many weeks or even months to make a full examination of the vast library — time we do not have. The entrance chamber, however, is less disturbed than the others, and so we immediately turned our attentions to it to see what could be found.

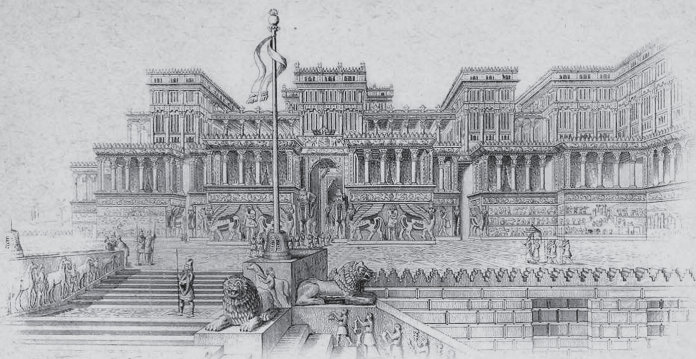


Whilst the workmen were clearing out the Chamber of the Lion they came across several heaps of inscribed baked clay tablets of "all shapes and sizes," which resembled in general appearance the tablets that Layard had found in the South West Palace 80 years ago. There were no remains with them, or near them, that suggested they had been arranged systematically and stored in the Chamber of the Lion, and it seems as if they had been brought there from another place and thrown down hastily, for nearly all of them were broken into small pieces.

When the tablets were examined by Puncheon, it was found that they formed a part of the great Private Library of Ashur-bani-pal, which that king kept in his palace, and had thus certainly been transported to the Royal Library at Nineveh. The tablets had been damaged in part by fire — they had almost certainly moved when the library at Ashur-bani-pal had burned down. This is a great find indeed, and thankfully of a far more mundane ilk than those of the temple.

The tablets almost certainly complete the set found by Layard in 1852 and by Rassam in '53, and will be much prized by the British Museum. It is impossible to over-estimate their importance and value from religious, historical and literary points of view; along with Layard and Rassam's Kouyunjik Collection, they will advance our ability to decipher cuneiform inscriptions in the Assyrian, Babylonian and Sumerian languages, tenfold.

Some notes on the Royal Library at Nineveh



Nothing is known of the early history of the library next to the Temple of Nabu at Nineveh. There is little doubt that it was in existence in the reign of Sargon II, and it was probably founded at the instance of the priests of Nabu who were settled at Nimrūd, about 20 miles downstream of Nineveh. Authorities differ in their estimate of the attributes that were assigned to Nabu in Pre-Babylonian times, and cannot decide whether he was a water-god, or a fire-god, or a corn-god, but he was undoubtedly associated with Marduk, either as his son or as a fellow-god. It is certain that as early as 2000 B.C. he was regarded as one of the "Great Gods of Babylonia", and about 1200 years later his cult was widespread in Assyria. He had a temple at Nimrūd in the ninth century B.C., and King Adad-Nirari (B.C. 811-783) set up six statues in it to the honour of the god; two of these statues are now in the British Museum. Under the last Assyrian Empire he was believed to possess the wisdom of all the gods, and to be the "All-wise" and "All-knowing." He was the inventor of all the arts and sciences, and the source of inspiration in wise and learned men, and he was the divine scribe and past master of all the mysteries connected with literature and the art of writing. Ashur-bani-pal addresses him as "Nabu, the beneficent son, the director of the hosts of heaven and of earth, holder of the tablet of knowledge, bearer of the Tablets of Destiny, lengthener of days, vivifier of the dead, stablisher of light for the men who are troubled." In the reign of Sargon II the temple library of Nabu was probably housed in some building at or near Nebu Yunus, or near Kouyunjik. As the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Henry Layard found the remains of Nabu's Library in the South West Palace in 1845, it is probable that Ashur-bani-pal built a new temple to Nabu there and had the library transferred to it. Nabu's temple at Nineveh, then, is more ancient than that previously uncovered, and bears the same name as his very ancient temple at Borsippa (the modern Birs-i-Nimrūd), viz., "E-Zida."

- Second addendum, same day, 11:45 p.m. -

I had retired to my tent early to-night, but I knew that there was no way I would find sleep, and so I lay awake reading for some time. I was disturbed by Willard Puncheon, who came to visit me most excitedly. He too had retired early, almost as soon as we had finished dinner in fact, and had gone to study some of the new tablets we had found in the library. He told me that he had made a startling discovery, which could change fundamentally our understanding of the Temple of Nabu and its true purpose.

Naturally I invited Willard to relate his findings, and soon I too was drawn into a most intriguing mystery — though one which may have repercussions beyond just Assyrian archaeology. For Willard had been busy correlating the new tablets with the strange transcriptions and carvings we had found throughout the Chamber of the Lion, and, I realised at once, with the scrolls he had taken from the Temple of Nabu.

I tried weakly to reprimand him for not consigning the scrolls to Banksmith's care — they should, after all, be aboard a ship in the docks at Tripoli by now — but Willard ignored me. He was in the grip of scholarly obsession, only a stone's throw from that which had already consumed Vervloet, and I confess I was on the verge of joining him!

Willard's grasp of ancient languages surpassed even my own, and my insight into his workings was limited. However, his findings were beyond doubt. He showed me excerpts of four ancient languages, one of which we had no knowledge of whatsoever — but Willard had discovered direct correlations through the cuneiform and pictograms that we had unearthed that all pointed to some rituals linked to the Temple of Nabu.

That fourth language, I am certain, is the mysterious Aklo script, that form of writing predating all known civilisations, said to have been found in archaeological sites the world over and long since dismissed by linguists as nothing more than scholarly errors, coincidence of runic forms, or pure fabrications.

That we had a genuine extract of that curious text in our hands was enough to cause my hands to tremble. That Willard Puncheon claimed to have translated a portion of the text was almost unbelievable.

Willard showed me the evidence, so that with my own eyes I saw that he was likely correct. He told me that the ritual phrase we had seen across this accursed site was present in all four languages; a refrain, repeated at the base of every statue, etched into the frieze around that dreadful mural, and carved into broken tablets of clay. That phrase, roughly translated, went thus:

“Herein is ensnared the Dragon, that ancient deity known to the lands of Mesopotamia as Nabu the Wise, but before that as the Guardian of the Gates, the Old One, IOG SOTOT. Those who would walk in His shadow must combine the Elements of Release, for then may the Way be prepared.

N’gai, n’gha’ghaa, bugg-shoggog, y’hah!
Yog-Sothoth, Yog-Sothoth, ai!
Y’hah, bugg-shoggog, n’gha’ghaa, n’gai!”

Puncheon read the words in a dialect I had never heard, with a queer look in his eyes and a sense of wild abandon. As he read the ancient chant, I could no longer focus on the letters spelled out before me.

My head began to swim, and visions of those tortured nightmares flashed in my memory like daggers of pain, and other visions too, forgotten until now — visions of that terrible vista of black rivers and swirling skies, of seven suns orbiting a world dominated by dark twisted towers and Cyclopean, crystalline orbs. And across that landscape, billions of creatures toiled like ants, creatures not of this world or the next.



The images flashed into my mind in rapid succession, and I cried out in agony. The sound of my own voice in my ears brought me to lucidity, and I saw that Puncheon was crying out too, but our shouts were lost beneath peals of thunder from outside. We stepped from the tent at once, and saw scores of workmen, villagers, women and children running hither and yon.

Grey-purple clouds coiled across an indigo sky. Lightning flashed, thunder roared, and the desert winds blew clouds of dust into the camp. Horses whinnied and tore loose of their tethers, escaping into the night, while another sound rose up from beyond the mound, from the excavation site at the Temple of Nabu — the sound of an enormous, braying bull.

Puncheon and I could only stare at each other in disbelief. He had read the words, words that had been smashed or burned by holy men who had lived millennia ago — words that had been pieced together by modern scholars in their hubris. Words meant never to be uttered.

May God forgive us for what we have done.

- Saturday 7th June, 1919 -

Last night, I had been momentarily unmanned by a sequence of bizarre events that further cast doubt on the future of our expedition. I was forced to snap to my senses quickly, and help in the organisation of the camp as the freak storm raged. Such an event is almost unheard of at this time of year, but myself and Brightman rallied as many men as we could to secure the tents and set off after the escaped horses. The work was wearying and our endeavour lasted well into the night. It was as the first crepuscular rays of dawn filtered through the breaking clouds, however, that we discovered another calamity — one that has made me think of quitting this place once and for all, and abandoning the work that I started with King years ago.

Banksmith is dead. The circumstances of his death appear to be accidental, but it can be no coincidence that he and Mulgrave are both gone, and that they were the only members of the expedition to have been with King and I when we first discovered the location of the temple in '03. The best of men, Banksmith! He was found at first light, his body crushed beneath a lintel fallen from the great doorway of the temple. The guards had abandoned their posts during the storm, and have not been heard of since. Why Banksmith went to the temple amidst the confusion was unknown at first, but we soon discovered the reason.

One of the diggers, though jabbering confusedly about demons and judgement in the night, was able to tell us that he had seen Banksmith go to the Temple of the Nabu, and that he had been following another man. The description of the other was certainly that of Vervloet. A head-count of our party showed clearly that Vervloet was still absent, and those of us who remained, still shaken with grief and confusion over Banksmith's death, knew at once that the Belgian had retreated into the temple, where he undoubtedly was still. His behaviour over the past week had become increasingly erratic — Brightman whispered to me that perhaps it was Vervloet who had murdered Banksmith. And where had the Belgian been when Mulgrave was killed? I argued, perhaps half-heartedly, that Vervloet had likely met a similar fate to the two dead men, and that it was our duty to find him. We had to follow, knowing not

whether we would find Vervloet dead or alive. But we did not enter those dark chambers unarmed.

The first of the chambers was much as we had left it, as was the large inner chamber beyond it. But once we entered the mural room, things took a darker turn. By torchlight we saw four bodies — workmen, lying dead upon the dusty flagstones, beneath the unsettling gaze of the painting of Nabu. We set lanterns before the large reflectors to direct more light into the room, and sure enough we saw that the workers, their tools scattered about them, had been shot. This was not the work of any curse or ancient gods — this was the work of a man.

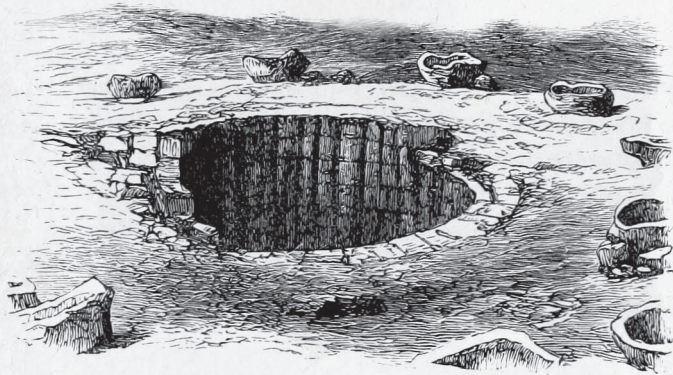


With great caution we proceeded through the two small, parallel rooms that had formerly been capped by the great stone seal. From the darkness beyond the open portal we heard a muttering, a guttural and incessant chatter in no tongue that we could understand clearly, but which sounded in its phonetic patterns much like the ancient text that Puncture had read aloud last night. We drew pistols and advanced stealthily; none of us wanted to lead the way into a possible trap.

No real strategy presented itself, and our nerves were on edge. Through whispers and gestures, we determined that Brightman, MacAvoy, Pritchard and myself would enter the room together, fanning out so as to cover as much ground as possible, and spread our lights in that hateful chamber. I hoped that Pritchard in particular would not be rash, for if there was any evidence that Vervloet had been responsible for the death of Mulgrave, there would surely be a retribution.

We executed this somewhat foolhardy plan quickly, before our already jangling nerves failed us. What we found inside, however, was anything but what we expected. I shall struggle to write this, but I must, if only to make sense of it all.

Within the inner sanctum, the central altar had been moved across the dais, and there were signs of excavations all around it. The sound of the muttering continued as if our intrusion had gone unnoticed, and it came from behind the altar. Upon investigating, we were all seized with an unimaginable terror. Beneath the original location of the altar was a pit perhaps twelve feet deep. When we peered into it, we saw Vervloet, his madness now beyond doubt. He sat upon a pile of bones — thousands of them perhaps — the bones of infants all. Between fevered mutterings, Vervloet intermittently picked up a bone from the pile and gnawed at it like a rat, before tossing it back upon the floor of that charnel pit and continuing his ravings. In his left hand, he held the satchel containing the relic — the Horn of Alû — clutching its strap so tightly that his palms were bleeding where his nails had dug into the flesh.



Though our stomachs were turned and our courage drained, we resolved to fetch Vervloet up from the pit at once. We required stout ropes, and Brightman and MacAvoy volunteered to go down into the revolting hole to drag the Belgian out. He did not move while they climbed down, but as soon as they laid hands on him he flew into a fearful rage, gouging at MacAvoy's face with grimy fingernails, spitting and kicking at Lord Brightman like the very Devil. At one point we feared we may have to shoot Vervloet before he could inflict more violence on his would-be rescuers, but finally MacAvoy managed to fend the Belgian off before Brightman pistol-whipped him, rendering him unconscious. So subdued, Vervloet was dragged from the pit, and taken at once to the dining tent. I secured the Horn of Alû immediately, lest its presence cause further unrest to Vervloet when he awoke.

As soon as Vervloet was sedated by MacAvoy, those of us who remained met directly at the dining tent, and drew Ahmed into our confidence also, as he had been a loyal agent

throughout the calamitous events of the dig. We decided upon a plan of action — we would aim to leave the site the very next day, for our own safety as much as anything, and return in greater numbers, with troops at our disposal to guard against our enemies who had so far struck at us unseen. The remaining crates would be sent to Tripoli under cover of darkness, and half of our group — Brightman, MacAvoy and Simpkins would follow them at first light, with a view to supervising the transportation of the relics. The rest of us — Pritchard, Puncheon and I — would head south to Baghdad. This diversion would not only help to confuse our enemies, but would result in my reaching a well-manned British garrison first, where I could seek an audience with General Maude personally and inform him of the attacks we had suffered by — we now assumed — Arab rebels.

Ahmed would remain at Nineveh, sealing the temple and library, and keeping watch over the site as best as he could until we returned. Having again entrusted him with the superintendence of the site, and given him all necessary directions, we prepared to quit Mosul at last. Ahmed used his contacts to secure us passage to Baghdad via river. The navigation of the river in this region was so insecure, however, that I deemed it prudent, in order to avoid a collision with the Arabs, to engage a Bedouin to accompany us.

Ahmed set out immediately to find a suitable guide who could be trusted. The plan was struck, and we set about at once preparing everything for our departure.

It is growing dark as I write this entry, and we prepare ourselves for one last night in this place that has become unbearable. But wait, there is more commotion brewing outside. What now!

- Wednesday 11th June, 1919 -

There has been no time for writing these past few days, and indeed I have hardly felt capable of doing so. We have drifted for days along the Tigris, feeling somewhat lethargic on our voyage. But now, I can at last see Baghdad looming from the haze and I shall try to order my thoughts.

On Saturday evening, just as soon as we had prepared ourselves to leave, a great ruckus struck up in the camp. At first I believed it to be a fight breaking out amongst the workmen, brought on perhaps by their increasing superstition and paranoia, but presently I heard gunshots ring out, and knew that we were under attack. I grabbed everything of value that I could carry — the Horn of Alû foremost amongst these items — and raced outside, pistol at the ready. There, I saw a scene of utter chaos. Black-robed Arab horsemen galloped through the camp, hacking down anyone who crossed their paths with their wickedly curved “zulfikar”.

One of the Arabs saw me at once and turned his horse about, racing at me with his sword held aloft. I was rooted to the spot, and would surely have been cut or trampled had not Brightman appeared from between our two tents, discharging his service pistol and slaying the Arab at once. This lent me newfound vigour, and I rallied to Brightman, intent on fighting my way out of the camp and to the horses.



Ahmed's guards were at last arriving, joining the fight with rifles ready, although the numbers of the horsemen were many. I saw Puncheon helping Pritchard walk, almost dragging him over to where Brightman and I stood. Lord Brightman fired at another passing horseman, and shouted over the din of battle that we must enact our plan of departure at once, and leave by night. It was not ideal, but I could see no other option. I asked Puncheon if he had seen the others, and he replied that MacAvoy and Simpkins had left to fetch Ahmed, and were likely with the horses already. I asked what we should do about Vervloet, and Puncheon shook his head sorrowfully.

"Murdered in his sleep," he said. "And Pritchard here almost joined him in fighting the assassin."

That was enough for me — the situation was grave indeed. Tents began to burn, gunfire filled the air. The sand was stained with blood. We had no choice but to flee.

Ahmed was ready for us, and assisted us in escaping whilst his men held off our mysterious attackers. At Ahmed's insistence, Pritchard, Puncheon and I engaged one Awaythe, a Sheikh of the Fedagha Shammar, to give us his protection until we had passed the danger. Our boat moved silently along the black river, and we watched the fires grow along the shoreline. The last we saw of the others, they were galloping westwards across the plains, pursued by the Arab horsemen. I still doubt Brightman's motives, and wonder if he could in some way be in league with these devils, but I can barely believe that his honour would allow him to resort to the murder of his companions. I can almost forgive him his avarice, but surely not complete

betrayal? If I do Brightman a disservice with my lingering suspicions, then I can only beg forgiveness, and wish him God speed to Tripoli.

It appeared after that that we had been the lucky ones. We reached Tekrit in three days without accident or adventure. Bedouin tents and moving swarms of men and animals were occasionally seen on the riverbanks, but under the protection of our Sheikh we met with no hindrance.

Tekrit is almost the only permanent settlement of any importance between Mosul and Baghdad. It is now a small town, but was once a place of some size and strength. Tekrit is chiefly famous as the birthplace of the celebrated Saleh-ed-din, better known to us as Saladin, the hero of the crusades, and the magnanimous enemy of our Richard Cœur-de-Lion. His father, Ayub, a chief of a Kurdish tribe of Rahwanduz, was governor of its castle for the Seljukian monarchs of Persia. Mosul itself sustained a siege from Saladin, who was repulsed by its Atabeg, or hereditary prince. Military expeditions into the Sinjar and other parts of Mesopotamia were amongst the exploits of this great Mosselman hero. Tekrit is now inhabited by a few Arabs, who carry on, as raftsmen, the traffic of the river between Mosul and Baghdad.



The very high-way from Mosul, and, consequently, from the capital, to Baghdad, in order to avoid the restless Bedouin, is carried along the foot of the Kurdish hills, leaving the river, adding many days to the journey, and exposing caravans to long delays from swollen streams. Even this road is no longer secure, for the utter negligence and dishonesty that have of late marked the conduct of the Turkish authorities in Southern Turkey have led to the interruption of this channel of commerce. The river, then continued to be our safest path, and Awaythe insisted that we remain on our little barge all the way to Baghdad.

Leaving Tekrit, we first passed a small whitewashed Mosselman tomb, rising on the left or eastern bank, in a plain that still bears the name of Dura. It was here, as some believe, that "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits and breadth six cubits, and called together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces to its dedication." It is now a wilderness, with here and there a shapeless mound, the remains of some ancient habitation.

On both sides of the river, as the raft is carried gently along by the sluggish current, we observed huge masses of brickwork jutting out from the falling banks, or overhanging the precipice of earth which hems in the stream. Here and there one sees the remains of the palaces and castles of the last Persian kings and of the first Caliphs.

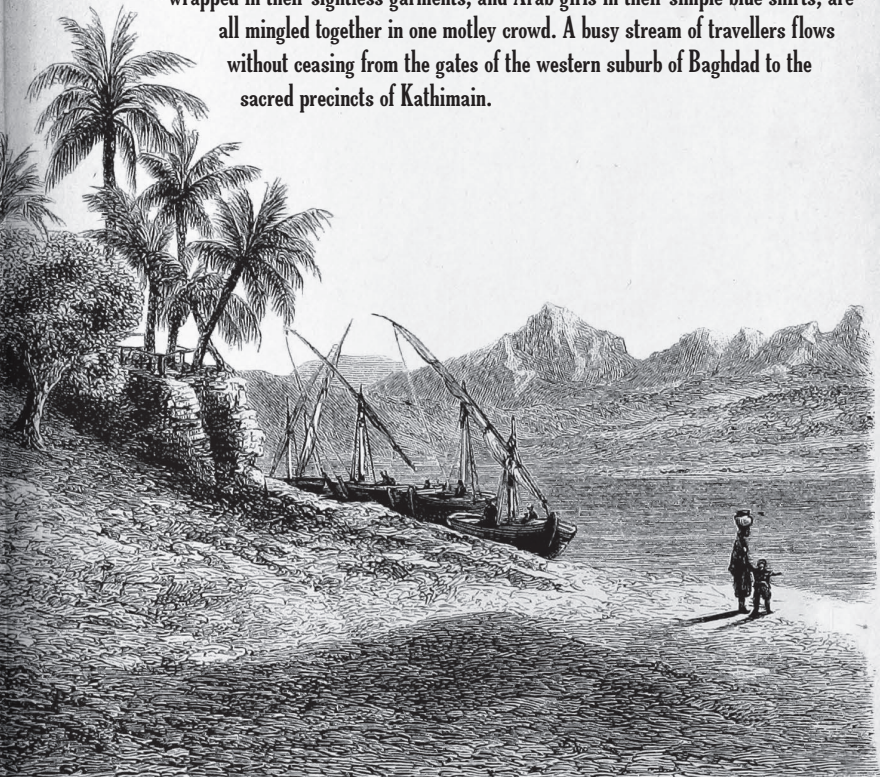
The place is still called Gadesia or Kadesia, and near it was fought that great battle which gave to the new nation issuing from the wilds of Arabia the dominion of the Eastern world. Remains of an earlier period are not wanting. A huge mound abutting on the west bank of the river, and still within sight of Samarrah, is known to the Arabs as the Sidd-ul-Nimroud, the wall or rampart of Nimroud. The current becomes gentler at every broad reach, until the raft scarcely glides past the low banks.



The water has lost its clearness and its purity; tinged by the alluvial soil it has turned to a pale yellow colour. The river at length widens into a noble stream. Groups of half-naked Arabs gather together on the banks to gaze at the travellers. A solitary raft of firewood for Baghdad floats, like ourselves, almost imperceptibly along.

The raft crept round a projecting bank and two gilded domes and four stately minarets, all glittering in the rays of an eastern sun, suddenly rose high above the dense bed of palms. They are of the mosque of Kathimain, which covers the tombs of two of the Imaums or holy saints of the Sheeah sect.

The low banks swarm with Arabs — men, women, and naked children. Mud hovels screened by yellow mats, and groaning water-wheels worked by the patient ox, are seen beneath the palms. The Tigris then grew wider and wider. Circular boats, of reeds coated with bitumen, skimmed over the water. Horsemen hurried along the riverside. Turks in flowing robes and white turbans, Persians in high black caps and close-fitting tunics, the Bokhara pilgrim in his white head-dress and way-worn garments, the Bedouin chief in his tasselled keffieh and striped aba, Baghdad ladies with their scarlet and white draperies fretted with threads of gold, and their black horsehair veils, concealing even their wanton eyes, Persian women wrapped in their sightless garments, and Arab girls in their simple blue shirts, are all mingled together in one motley crowd. A busy stream of travellers flows without ceasing from the gates of the western suburb of Baghdad to the sacred precincts of Kathimain.



As I write, we are now passing the palace, an edifice of mean materials and proportions. A crazy bridge of boats crosses the stream, and appears to bar all further progress. At length the chains are loosened, two or three of the rude vessels are withdrawn, and the rafts glide gently through. A few minutes more, and we shall be anchored beneath the spreading folds of the British flag, opposite a handsome building, not crumbling into ruins like its neighbours, but kept in repair with European neatness. A small iron steamer floats motionless before it. We have arrived at the dwelling of the English Consul-general and political agent of the East India Company at Baghdad.



- Thursday 12th June, 1919 -

Oh, how I have missed good food, soft beds and British hospitality! The horrors of Nineveh seem a thousand miles away, though we are not yet quitted of them. Yesterday, when we landed at the quay of the British residency, we were greeted by Captain Kemball, now the East India Company's Resident at Bushire. He received me with great kindness, and upon hearing of our distress, conveyed me at once to General Maude.

More than fifteen years had passed since my first visit to the city. Time had worked its changes amongst those who then formed the happy and hospitable English society of Baghdad. Twelve years ago four steamers floated on the Tigris, and were engaged in exploring the then almost unknown rivers of Mesopotamia and Susiana. Their officers formed a small English colony in Baghdad, the legacy of which has already been far reaching. Of this society, General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude stands guardian, and it is he to whom I

reported my account of the expedition, and to him only, for I was still sworn to utter secrecy about the exact nature and location of the dig.

I was forced to withhold some details of my account to the General, for I feared he would not believe the more esoteric aspects of what had befallen my party. Indeed, in the light of day I am not sure I believe them myself! General Maude had not received my earlier dispatch, which can only mean that the messenger had been intercepted, or was himself an agent of our enemy. It was the learning of this new enemy that spurred Maude to action — he has not founded his reputation on laxity, and so he vowed at once to meet these rebels with a firm hand. As we formulated our battle-plans, we agreed on a course of action that would suit both my sponsors back home and Maude's sense of retribution. We determined to not only put down this rebel uprising in the north, but also to remove the Temple of Nabu wholesale. If its discovery had so encouraged fanatics to rise up against their English liberators, then it would be removed from the territory altogether, and shipped stone-by-stone to England. The General put a company of men at my disposal, and telegraphed ahead to Tripoli to ensure that the rest of our party was received safely. These black-clad cowards shall soon find that they have crossed swords with no ordinary scholar.

- Thursday 26th June, 1919 -

The time is drawing near for my departure. Once more I am about to leave the ruins to which I was bound by so many ties, both pleasant and solemn; and probably to return no more.

I only await the arrival of Captain Abde, a native officer who is to be my companion on the journey to Tripoli. Though the attacks have become less fierce and the Arabs have all but been subdued, without a strong escort it is scarcely prudent to venture on a journey across the plains. It was doubly necessary for me to have proper protection, as I take with me the final stones from the Temple of Nabu, not to mention the valuable collection of bronzes and other small objects discovered in the ruins.



In these pages I have occasionally indulged in reflections suggested by the scenes I have had to describe, and have ventured to point out the moral of the strange tale I have had to relate. I cannot better conclude than by showing the spirit in which Eastern philosophy and Mosselman resignation contemplate the evidences of ancient greatness and civilisation, suddenly rising up in the midst of modern ignorance and decay. A letter in my possession contained so true

and characteristic a picture of the feelings that such an event excites in the mind of a good Mohammedan, that I here give a literal translation of its contents. It was written to Ahmed by a Turkish Cadi, in reply to some inquiries as to the commerce, population, and remains of antiquity of Nineveh. These are its words:—

“My Illustrious Friend!

“The thing you ask of me is both difficult and useless. Although I have passed all my days in this place, I have neither counted the houses nor have I inquired into the number of the inhabitants; and as to what one person loads on his mules and the other stows away in the bottom of his ship, that is no business of mine. But, above all, as to the previous history of this city, God only knows the amount of dirt and confusion that the infidels may have eaten before the coming of the sword of Islam. It were unprofitable for us to inquire into it.

“Of a truth, thou hast spoken many words; and there is no harm done, for the speaker is one and the listener is another. After the fashion of thy people thou hast wandered from one place to another until thou art happy and content in none. We (praise be to God) were born here, and never desire to quit it. Is it possible then that the idea of a general intercourse between mankind should make any impression on our understandings? God forbid!

“Listen, oh my son! There is no wisdom equal unto the belief in God! He created the world, and shall we liken ourselves unto him in seeking to penetrate into the mysteries of his creation? Shall we say, behold this star spinneth round that star, and this other star with a tail goeth and cometh in so many years! Let it go! He from whose hand it came will guide and direct it.

“But thou wilt say unto me, Stand aside, oh man, for I am more learned than thou art, and have seen more things. If thou thinkest that thou art in this respect better than I am, thou art welcome. I praise God that I seek not that which I require not. Thou art learned in the things I care not for; and as for that which thou hast seen I defile it. Will much knowledge create thee a double belly, or wilt thou seek Paradise with thine eyes?

“Oh, my friend! If thou wilt be happy, say, There is no God but God! Do no evil, and thus wilt thou fear neither man nor death; for surely thine hour will come!

“The meek in spirit (El Fakir),

“**IMAUM ALI ZADE.**”

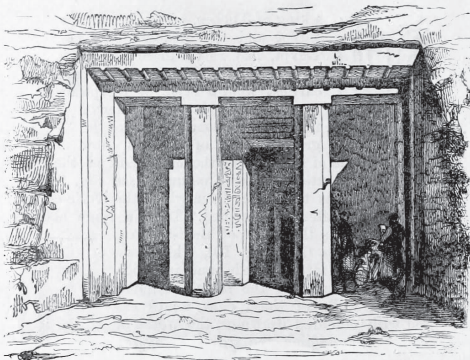
These words will remain with me for some time, for despite all the evil I have encountered in this strange land, it reminds me of those devout men and good friends that I have known also. I know in my heart I cannot return, knowing the things that I know; seeing the things that I have seen — and yet I shall regret it for years to come, I am sure. To-morrow I shall bid a last farewell to my faithful Arab friends, and with a heavy heart turn from the ruins of ancient Nineveh once and for all.

- Addendum, same day -

It is fitting that I received a message from Dr. MacAvoy this afternoon, informing me that after his short rest in Cyprus he is set to return home to England. He related to me what a relief it had been when finally he had left the Arab lands and put some distance of ocean between him and Nineveh — he wrote that he hopes I can find the same solace when I myself leave. Brightman, it seems, left Cyprus some time ago, determined to accompany the first shipments of artefacts to England himself. For my part, I naturally telegraphed ahead to my colleagues in the intelligence agency, relating what I know of Brightman's dealings with black-market traders. I imagine they will take care of the matter before I even reach British soil. If not, then I am at least thankful that the so-called Scrolls of Endless Shadow and the Horn of Alû are in the possession of myself and Puncheon — I shudder to think what might happen should all six of the Elements of Release fall into the wrong hands.

Finally, before I end this journal, and quit this land, I must end on a warning for any who think to follow in my footsteps. I have pieced together the myriad texts found in Nineveh, and have completed the translation of the words found outside the Temple of Nabu. They read:

“Know, O Priest, that this temple has become a prison, where slumbers the great god, Nabu, under the gaze of his many Children. Let none disturb the elements of His release herein, lest they be cursed with the blackest spells. For his crimes, may Nabu's entombment last for all eternity, for the sake of all.”



- Final Addendum, 1925 -

Brightman is dead, murdered in his own home. I know not by whose hand — he has mixed with a rum bunch of fellows in his time, that much I know, but he has been much diminished in character since his return. Or could it be the ‘curse’?

That leaves myself and Willard, who after years of research is finally preparing to translate his precious scrolls, MacAvoy and Simpkin.

Willard Puncheon is in Worthing, West Sussex, although I more often meet with him on his frequent trips to London — he keeps a flat in Finsbury for such occasions.

Terrence MacAvoy still lives at Hebron Road, W6, but he has become something of a recluse of late.

Peter Simpkin is at 85 Lavender Grove, E8. Still holds me responsible for what happened.

The rest — dead, perhaps. I hope that I do not soon join their number.



Keeper's Notes – How to Use this Book

If you are a *Call of Cthulhu* player, it's probably best if you put this book down now. If you're the Keeper, we present to you a handful of ideas as to how you might use The Journal of Reginald Campbell Thompson in your games.

- The journal is designed as a prelude for ***The Curse of Nineveh*** campaign, also published by Cubicle 7. The scenes and events the journal describes will eventually trigger the start of the campaign. The most straightforward way to use the journal is therefore simply to read through it prior to play, to accustom yourself with an extended background to the characters and dangers that appear in ***The Curse of Nineveh***.
- As the journal is designed to resemble a real-world artefact that might be found by the investigators – in Chapters 1 and 6 (see ***The Curse of Nineveh***, pages 46 and 208), specifically – at the appropriate point of the game simply hand it to the players. This might be best done towards the end of a session, so that they might have the chance to read it before you next play. While ***The Curse of Nineveh*** summarises the contents of the journal (on page 46), reading it will allow the players to get the full flavour of the backstory for themselves and glean their own clues.
- The story told within the journal provides all manner of plot hooks and ideas for scenarios in and of itself. Rather than treat it as backstory for the campaign, you could play through the events of Thompson's expedition, with your investigators cast as the brave archaeologists accompanying him to Nineveh to excavate the Temple of Nabu, or perhaps the British soldiers who return to drive off the Children of Tranquillity. What then becomes of the expedition – and the Elements of Release – is something you'll have to find out yourself in play, and could have consequences, for better or worse, for ***The Curse of Nineveh***.

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No offence to anyone living or dead or to the inhabitants of any of these places is intended. Just as these stories have formed the basis for local folklore, so they are being used here as the basis around which to spin tales about the ancient horrors from the imagination of H. P. Lovecraft and those who have expanded upon his visions.

