

FROM SÎN TO SALADIN: EXCAVATIONS IN HARRAN'S GREAT MOSQUE, WITH NEW LIGHT ON THE BABYLONIAN KING NABONIDUS AND HIS 104-YEAR-OLD MOTHER.

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(The finds described here were made during a two-week season in 1952, sponsored by the Walker Trust of St. Andrews, and a three-week season in 1956, sponsored by the British Academy, the Walker Trust and the Leverhulme Trust. The excavations were directed by the author, who was assisted in 1956 by Dr. D. E. Strong, now Assistant Keeper in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities of the British Museum. The work was carried out under the auspices of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara. The representative of the Turkish Department of Antiquities, on both occasions, was Bayan Sabahat Arat, Director of the Museum of Gaziantep. All the photographs are by the writer, and his copyright is reserved.)

ANCIENT Harran is of interest to students of many periods of Near Eastern history and to students of the history of religions. The first mention of the city occurs on a tablet found at Mari and datable to c. 1750 B.C. It records that a treaty signed with the turbulent tribe of the Bene Yamina (the Benjaminites, or their first cousins) was sealed and solemnly deposited in the temple of the Moon god Sin at Harran. When Terah took his family with him from Ur of the Chaldees and journeyed to Harran (Gen. XI, 31), he was merely leaving a city in which the Moon god was the chief deity for another city of this god (Nannar and Sin are synonymous). Terah's son Abraham continued to migrate south-westwards, but his other son, Nahor, settled at Harran, which is also referred to in the Biblical accounts as "the city of Nahor" or "Padan Aram" (*padānu* and its synonym *kharrānu* mean "road"). The names aptly describe the location of Harran (Fig. 1) on a vital cross-road at which the major highways of ancient Mesopotamia and Syria intersected. It is at Harran, "without the city, by a well of water," that the idyllic encounter between Jacob and Rachel took place (Gen. XXIX, 10); this is the well, which even to-day provides the only supply of drinking water in the area.

gradually eclipsed by Edessa (modern Urfa), which occupies a geographically more favourable position some 30 miles to the north-north-west. The decline of Harran as Metropolis of Mesopotamia became particularly marked when, in A.D. 204, Edessa adopted Christianity. Harran clung tenaciously to its pagan cults. It is there that the Emperor Caracalla met his death—when on the way to pay his devotions at the temple of the Moon god. Julian the Apostate found among the inhabitants of the city many enthusiastic supporters, and throughout the Byzantine period the Syriac writers of Edessa fulminated against Harran's pagan rites.

Nor did matters change substantially when both Harran and Edessa were captured by the Muslim armies in A.D. 639. For a short period Harran achieved new grandeur when, under the last ruler of the first Muslim dynasty, Marwān II (A.D. 744-750), it became the capital of the Muslim Empire (stretching then from Spain to the Indus). Under the Abbasids, it reverted to the status of a provincial city, but its cultural influence during the golden age of Islam was immense. Many Harranians took part in the translation of Greek and Syriac scientific and philosophical texts into Arabic; one need but recall such names as those of Thābit ibn Qurra and his descendants, the astronomer Battāni or the alchemist Jābir ibn Hayyān, the Geber of the Middle Ages.

To escape persecution, the Harranian pagans called themselves Sabians. This creed,

the most lofty philosophical systems. In all probability, we must discount the gruesome tales related by their detractors (such as accounts of human sacrifices, etc.) as spiteful fabrications. The Sabians were able to maintain themselves as an honoured and active minority in the Muslim society surrounding them, and it is not until the eleventh century that we hear of the destruction of the last Sabian temple at Harran. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries Harran became once more, as in the Greco-Roman period, a frontier town. Its immediate neighbour to the north was the first county of the Crusaders with

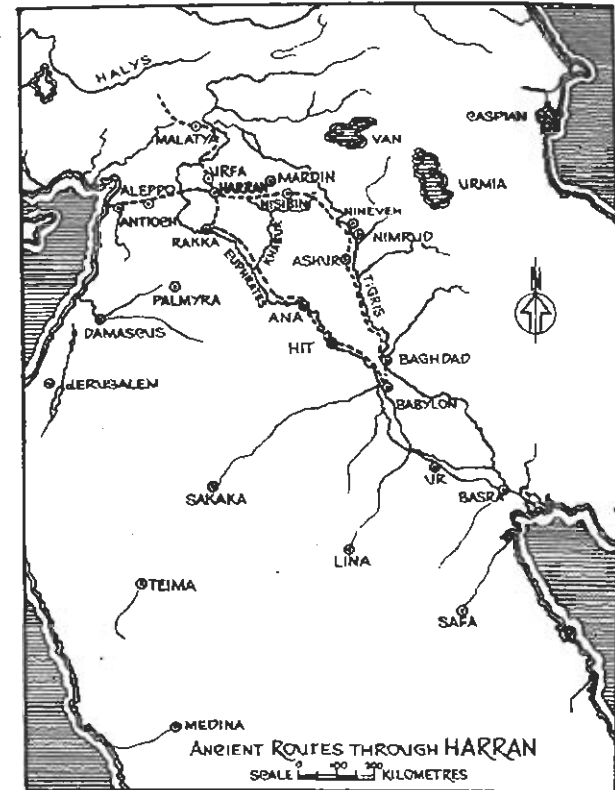


FIG. 1. A MAP OF THE MIDDLE EAST TO SHOW THE STRATEGIC POSITION OF ANCIENT HARRAN; AND ALSO THE LOCATION OF THE ARABIAN CITIES TO WHICH KING NABONIDUS WITHDREW.



During the First Millennium B.C. a good deal is recorded about the great temple of the Moon god at Harran, known by its Sumerian name, E Khul-Khul (the Temple of Rejoicing). Two Assyrian kings and one Babylonian restored it. Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) was responsible for the first rebuilding. Assurbanipal, two centuries later (668-628 B.C.), found that the walls had crumbled from old age. He restored the edifice and roofed it with cedar wood, brought at great expense and trouble from the Lebanon. The halls he adorned with lapis lazuli-inlaid friezes and the doors with silver decorations. Assurbanipal himself was crowned at Harran and his younger brother became the High Priest of Sin there. When in 612 B.C. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell an attempt was made to re-group the Assyrian forces at Harran. The third rebuilding of the temple of Sin was due to the last Babylonian king, Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.), whose mother was a devotee of the god and whose daughter served the same divinity as high priestess at Ur. Nabonidus, himself probably of Aramaic extraction, was a fanatical worshipper of Sin, a circumstance which brought him into conflict with the priests of Marduk, the principal deity of his capital, Babylon. His disagreement with the religious leaders and others made him withdraw for more than half his reign to the Arabian oasis of Teima, leaving the regency of the empire in the hands of his son, Belshazzar. When Nabonidus finally returned to Babylon it was only to succumb before the Persian armies of Cyrus. Like all other Babylonian provinces, Harran was incorporated in the Persian Empire from 539 B.C.

until some 200 years later Alexander's expedition placed it under new masters come from the west. For centuries the plain in which Harran lies was the battleground between Persians and Greeks, Romans and Parthians, Byzantines and Sasanians. Karrai—Carrhae—as the city was now called, was



FIG. 2. DATED TO THE LAST YEAR OF SALADIN'S LIFE: THE ENTRANCE IN THE EAST WALL OF THE COURTYARD.

Under this cusped arch is a very badly damaged Arabic inscription bearing the date 588 of the Hegira (i.e., 1192 A.D.) which corresponds to the last year of Saladin's life.

being mentioned in the Qur'an as based on a revelation, secured for them a status of equality with the Christians and Jews and made them protected subjects of the Caliph. Many of these Sabians attained high office at Baghdad and used their influence at Court to obtain privileges for their brethren. There seems little doubt that under their cloak of respectability, the Harranians continued to worship the planets, though forms of worship probably varied from crude idolatry to

its seat at Edessa (A.D. 990-1081). Despite the short distance which separated Edessa from Harran and repeated onslaughts of the Crusaders, Harran never fell before them. The city was fortified and embellished by the two great leaders of the counter-crusade, Nūr ad-dīn and Saladin. A Spanish traveller, Ibn Jubair, who visited it in 1184 describes it as having "markets which are admirably disposed and wonderfully arranged. They are roofed with wood, and men within them are never out of the long shade. You pass through them, as you would pass through a palace with large corridors. At every point where four markets meet, a great dome of plaster has been erected." Of all this splendour, nothing remains. In A.D. 1260 the Mongols took the city. They first tried to maintain a garrison there, but when this proved too costly, owing to the frequency and effectiveness of Mamlūk and Bedouin raids, they resorted to a scorched-earth policy and laid waste a large belt of land east of the Euphrates. A contemporary writer describes the destruction of Harran: "The great mosque was destroyed; the population was evacuated to Mardin and elsewhere; the gates of the town were walled up." To-day Harran is hardly more than a village, but its wall, most of the citadel, the minaret of the great mosque and part of its eastern wall are still visible above ground (Fig. 3).

In 1950 a small sounding was made at the main gate of the citadel and brought to light some sculptures and a Kufic inscription dated A.D. 1058 which gave the genealogy of a little-known dynasty—the Numairids—who ruled Harran for a century before the first Crusade (*I.L.N.*, September 20, 1950, and "Anatolian Studies, II," 1952, pp. 36-84); In 1952 (for two weeks) (*I.L.N.*, February 21, 1953) and in 1956 (for three weeks), what resources were available were concentrated on work at the great mosque. [Continued opposite.]

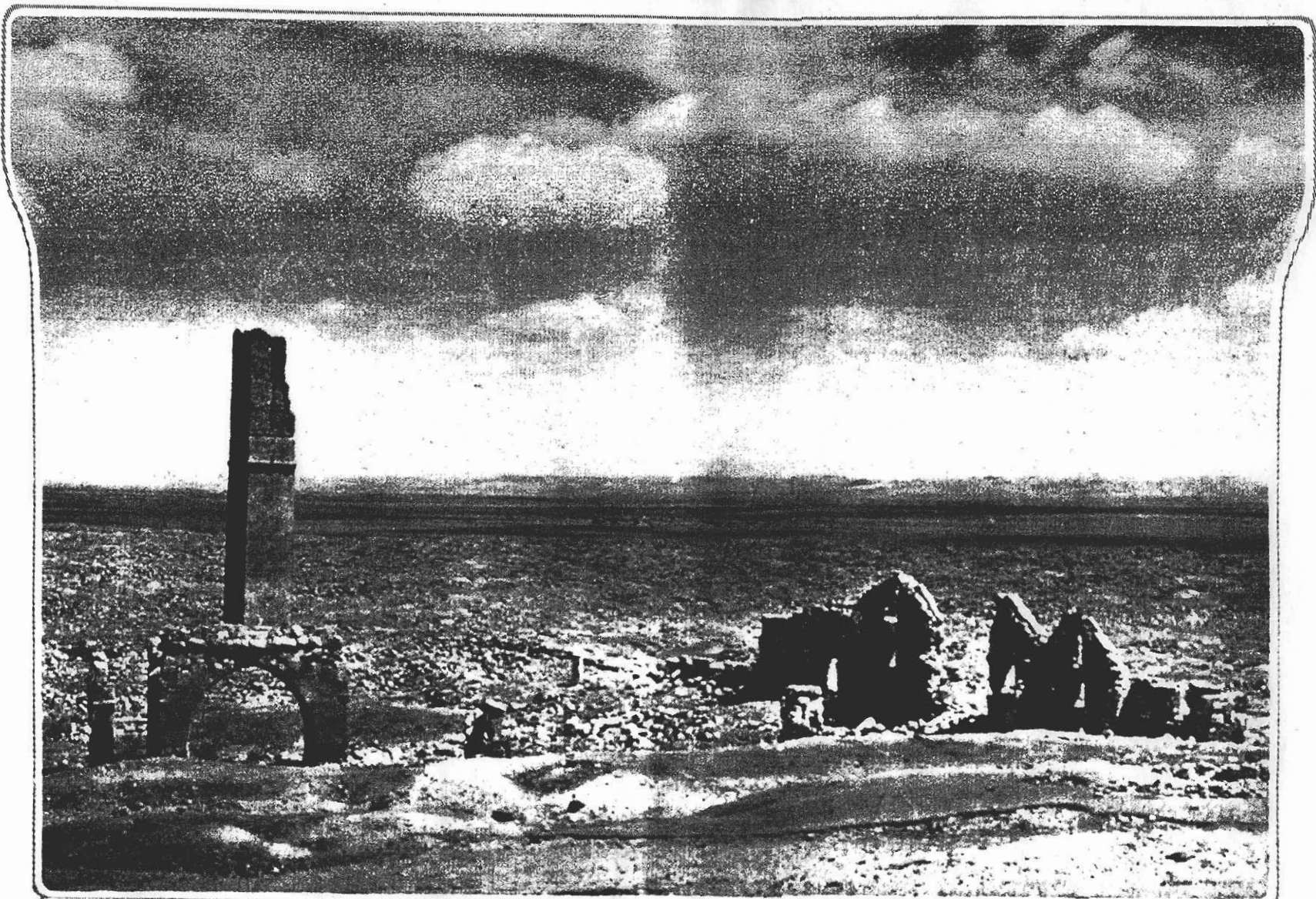


FIG. 3. THE RUINS OF THE GREAT MOSQUE AT HARRAN, WHICH MAY HAVE REPLACED THE MOON-TEMPLE OF SIN IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY A.D.

[Continued.]

Arabic historical sources supply the following data about the mosque.

(i) In A.D. 639 the Muslim conquerors took from the Harranians a pagan temple which they converted into a mosque; they also gave them permission to build a temple on another site.

(ii) The last Umayyad Caliph, Marwān II (A.D. 744-750), built a sumptuous palace for himself at Harran. Nothing is reported of any work that he may have done at the mosque, but it is only reasonable to assume that he must have embellished, if not enlarged, the Friday Mosque when the city became, through his choice, the capital of the Muslim Empire. (iii) Nūr ad-dīn (A.D. 1146-1174) restored the mosque. The ruins of the building to-day form roughly a square measuring 103 by 103 metres. There are four aisles in the sanctuary and the courtyard is surrounded by porticoes, two on the east side and one each on the north and west sides. We owe the last description of the edifice before its destruction by the Mongols to the same Spanish traveller, Ibn Jubair. He saw it in 1184 after its embellishment by Nūr ad-dīn.

"The wall which is contiguous with the courtyard through which entry is made is full of doors," he writes; "their number is nineteen: nine to the right and nine to the left, the nineteenth being a huge door that stands in their middle with its arch reaching from the top of the wall to the bottom. It is a splendid sight and of fine conformation as if it were the gate of a great city."

This description perfectly fits the large arch (8.20 metres span) which occupies the centre of the court-façade of the sanctuary and remains standing to its full height to-day (Fig. 4). The smaller arches which flanked it on either side have fallen with their columns, voussoirs and blocking stones keeping their relative positions. Some of these were uncovered and one was partially reconstructed on the spot (Fig. 12). The elaborate arabesque ornaments on the voussoirs, brackets and capping stones belong to the Ayyubid style of the twelfth century. This is confirmed by a fine ornamental inscription which gives the completion of the work as A.H. 570-A.D. 1174 (Fig. 13). The pavement of the aisle behind the great arch is different from that of the remaining three aisles, and it



FIG. 4. THE GREAT ARCH OF THE COURT-FACÈDE OF THE MOSQUE SANCTUARY. THE ARCH SPAN IS 27 FT.

is clear that all of it is an addition of Nūr ad-dīn. Late-antique, engaged, sandstone columns, made of three drums each, were used to decorate the great arch (Fig. 16), but it is surprising to find (on a monument built at the height of the struggle against the Crusaders) a re-used capital whose acanthus leaves are surmounted by a wreath tied in a knot round a quite unmistakable cross (Fig. 15). There is a narrower central opening in the third arcade which was carried by twin columns resting on rectangular plinths, and capped by rectangular capitals. The capital nearest to the east wall of the sanctuary is dated by the ornamental inscription (Fig. 13), but some others like that in Fig. 14 (from the western half of the sanctuary) can hardly be as late as A.D. 1174. The second arcade consists

[Continued overleaf.]



FIG. 5. SET SO THAT THE FAITHFUL SHOULD TREAD THE IMAGES UNDERFOOT : ONE OF THE THREE STELÆ OF NABONIDUS SET FACE DOWNWARDS IN THE EAST ENTRANCE.



FIG. 6. THE UPPER PART OF THE STELE FOUND IN THE NORTH ENTRANCE (FIG. 9). IT GIVES A NEW LIST OF ASSYRIAN KINGS AND DESCRIBES THE FUNERAL OF NABONIDUS' MOTHER.

[Continued.]

mainly of re-used antique columns and capitals of types which are known in the Osroene before the Islamic conquest. There are indications that the mosque may have consisted, at some stage, of two aisles only. The last arcade shows an alternating arrangement of piers and pairs of columns. On the *qibla* wall, there was, in addition to a concave *mihrab* (west from centre), an earlier, flat *mihrab* flanked on its eastern side by a door, which must have been the private entrance used first by the Caliph and later by the Governor.

The sanctuary was originally roofed by massive rafters, the like of which Ibn Jubair had not encountered anywhere else on his travels. Many charred remains of these, some still bearing Ayyubid arabesque ornaments carved in relief, were found when the pavement was uncovered. The plan of the sanctuary shows many irregularities and provides



Many charred remains of these, some still bearing Ayyubid arabesque ornaments carved in relief, were found when the pavement was uncovered. The plan of the sanctuary shows many irregularities and provides evidence of repeated rebuilding. It is difficult, at present, to ascribe any particular stage of the work to the Umayyad period. The square minaret (still standing to 26 metres height) (Fig. 3) is undoubtedly one of the rare surviving minarets of the Umayyad period. No ornament found in the sanctuary can be reliably dated to this period, but a large fragment of a capital from the north portico is perfectly consistent

with such an attribution. Access to the courtyard is now gained through a doorway in the east wall surmounted by a cusped arch (Fig. 2) under which a very badly damaged Arabic inscription bears the date 588/1192, which corresponds to the last year of Saladin's life. But there were originally three other entrances, all of which had to be excavated. In the course of the clearance of these entrances, three remarkable finds were made. In the middle of the east entrance, which was the first to be uncovered, there lay a 2-metre-



FIG. 7. THE UPPER PART OF EAST ENTRANCE STELE (FIG. 5). BESIDE THE HEAD OF THE BEARDED FIGURE IN BABYLONIAN DRESS ARE THE SYMBOLS OF SÎN, SHAMASH AND ISHTAR



FIG. 8. THE UPPER PART OF THE WEST ENTRANCE STELE, SIMILAR TO THAT OF FIG. 7. THE TEXTS RELATE NABONIDUS' SELF-IMPOSED EXILE IN ARABIA AND RETURN TO HARRAN.



FIG. 9. THE NORTH ENTRANCE OF THE MOSQUE. THE STELE OF FIG. 6 IS SEEN, FACE DOWNWARDS, UNDER THE MEASURE. THE HEAD OF THIS STELE IS MISSING.

long, *stèle*-shaped basalt stone. Its head was rounded in a half-circle and at the other end was a short, narrow, wedge-shaped projection. Behind it, also fitted to form part of the pavement, was a rectangular basalt stone with a hole in the middle (filled with white sandstone) which corresponded in size to the wedge-shaped projection (Fig. 5). When the larger stone was turned over it was found that the rounded top showed a relief of a bearded male figure in Babylonian dress, wearing a mitre-shaped, spiked headgear, with bandlets falling on the back. The figure was

depicted advancing from right to left, holding a ringed staff in one hand and raising the other towards three divine symbols—those of Sin (the Moon god), Shamash (the Sun god) and Ishtar (the Morning Star), with that of Sin nearest to him (Fig. 7). Under the relief, covering the remaining surface of the basalt slab, were three columns of cuneiform script. There was evidence of a deliberate attempt to deface the face of the figure, and the text before the stone



FIG. 10. THE WEST ENTRANCE TO THE COURTYARD OF THE MOSQUE SHOWING THE STELE (UNDER A MEASURE) OF FIG. 8 SET DOWN AS ONE OF THE STEPS OF A STAIRWAY.

[Continued opposite.]

ORNAMENT ASSYRIAN, CLASSICAL AND ISLAMIC OF THE GREAT HARRAN MOSQUE.



FIG. 11. AN ASSYRIAN COLUMN BASE (CENTRE), PERHAPS FROM THE TEMPLE OF SĪN, USED AS AN ORNAMENT IN A TWELFTH-CENTURY ABLUTION BASIN.

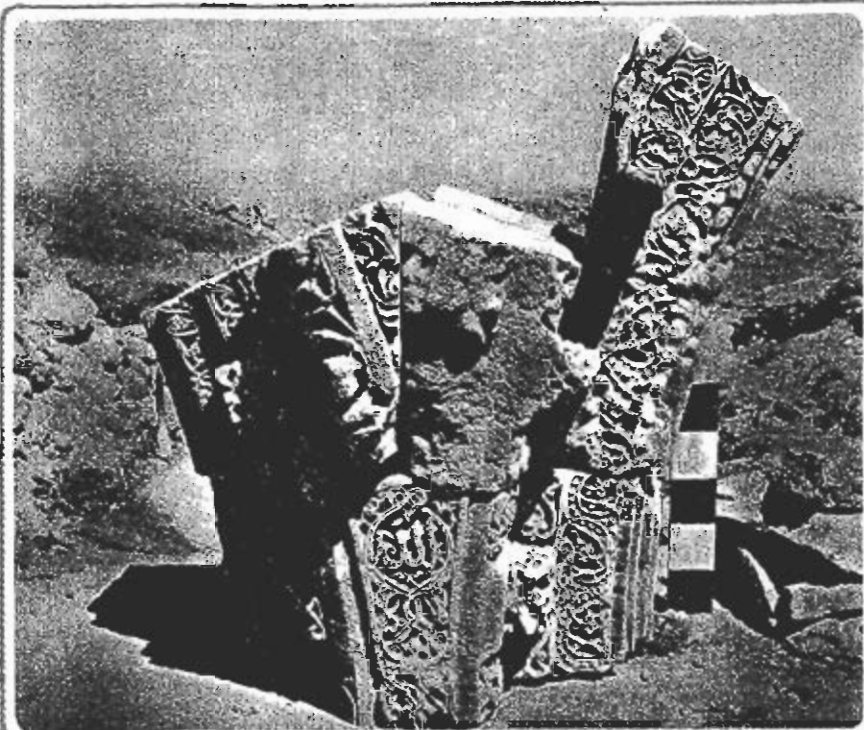


FIG. 12. PART OF AN ELABORATELY CARVED ARCH, RECONSTRUCTED ON THE SPOT AND ONCE PART OF THE TWELFTH-CENTURY FACADE WHICH INCLUDED THE GREAT ARCH (FIG. 4).

Continued.] was placed face downwards in the east entrance. A similar *stela* was found at the west entrance of the mosque's enclosure. It formed the uppermost step in a staircase consisting of nine stairs which led from the street-level to the courtyard (Figs. 8 and 10). The third basalt *stela* was recovered in the north entrance (Fig. 9), and was different. Its rounded top had been cut to obtain a square stone (Fig. 6), but the lower parts of four figures (two holding the already-mentioned ringed staffs), moving towards an unidentified object to the left of the stone, can still be seen. Cuneiform writing occupied two wide columns of script under the relief and a third column was incised in

the right, narrow side of the stone. The texts and translations of the three documents are shortly to be published by Professor C. J. Gadd, F.B.A., who has kindly undertaken their decipherment from latex-squeezes made on the spot. All three *stelae* are by Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.). The first two (Figs. 7 and 8), showing the king with the three divine symbols, relate the attempt of Nabonidus to rebuild



FIG. 14. A CAPITAL FROM THE WESTERN PART OF THE THIRD ARCADE. THIS IS NOT DATED BUT IT MAY NOT BE AS LATE AS THE A.D. 1174 EXAMPLE SHOWN IN FIG. 13.

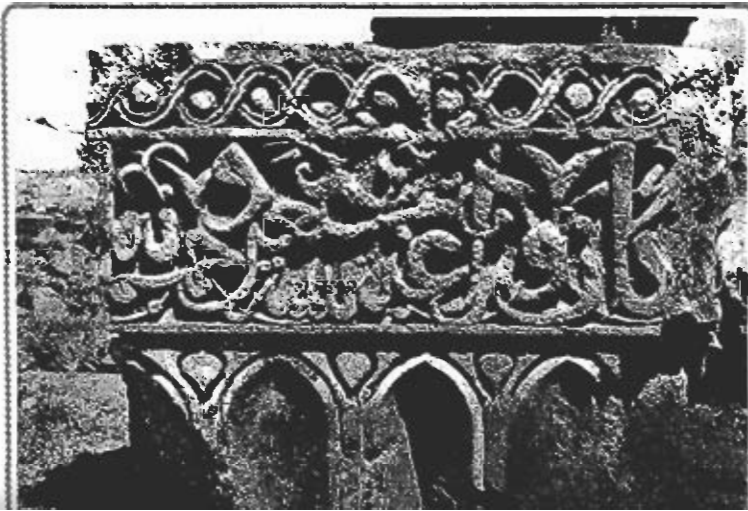


FIG. 13. AN INSCRIBED CAPITAL FROM THE THIRD ARCADE OF THE MOSQUE. THE ORNAMENTAL INSCRIPTION DATES THE COMPLETION OF THE WORK TO THE EQUIVALENT OF A.D. 1174.

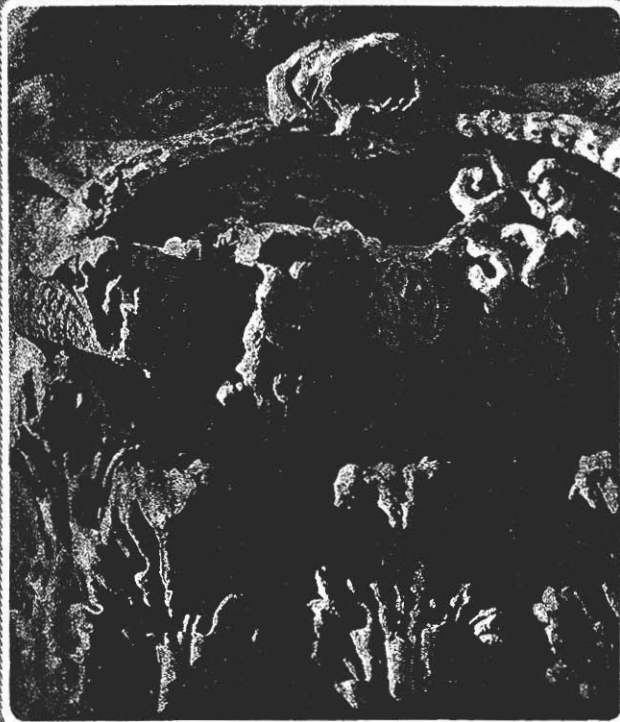


FIG. 15. AT THE TOP OF THIS CAPITAL IS A CROSS—AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY, AS THIS MONUMENT WAS BUILT DURING THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CRUSADERS.

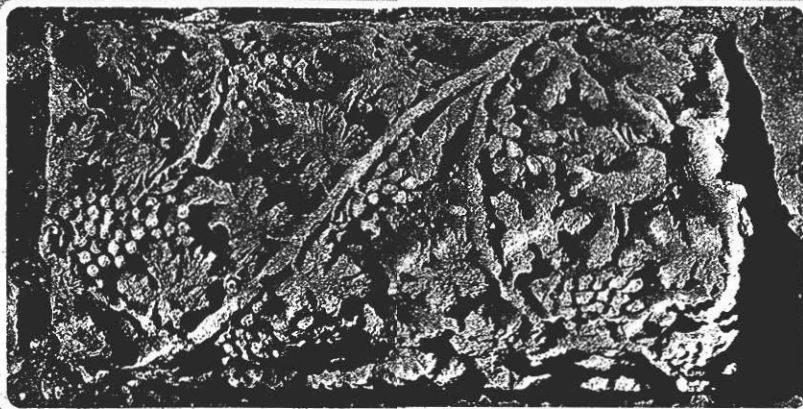


FIG. 16. A DRUM OF A LATE ANTIQUE COLUMN, WITH VINE DECORATION—USED TO ADORN THE GREAT ARCH (FIG. 4) OF THE MOSQUE.

attempt of Nabonidus to rebuild the temple of Sin at Harran, his disagreement with his rebellious subjects and unruly priests, his self-imposed exile in Arabia, his subsequent return and the completion of his devout project to rebuild E Khul-Khul, as he had been commanded to do, in a famous dream, by the god himself. These texts, which exist in no other versions, throw new light on a hitherto obscure period of Babylonian history. They also reveal that Nabonidus (while building for himself, as was already known, "a city like Babylon" at Teima) had travelled as far south as Yatribu (= Yathrib = the ancient name of Medina), 200 miles away. This is

the earliest-known mention of the city which was to achieve fame later as the city of the Prophet Muhammad. The third *stela* (Fig. 6), with four, unfortunately, incomplete figures, provides a complete version of a text known until now only from a fragment found by M. Henri Pognon in 1906 some miles north of Harran. It begins with words put into the mouth of Nabonidus' mother, a great devotee of Sin, and

concludes with the description of the State funeral accorded her after her death at the ripe age of 104 (years of the Moon god). Apart from settling the vexed question of the authorship of Pognon's fragment (which has caused a good deal of ink to flow), it supplies a new chronological list of the Assyrian kings and other hitherto unknown details. The discovery of the three *stelae* and of an Assyrian column base (very similar to those found at Senjirli and Khorsabad), re-used as a central, ornamental piece (Fig. 11) in an octagonal ablution basin with Ayyubid (twelfth century A.D.) mouldings, leads to the following conclusions: (i) these building materials were taken from an edifice situated not far away, and perhaps from a building which had occupied the site of the mosque itself; (ii) the fragment found in 1906 by Pognon had probably come from the same building; (iii) the *stelae* were used by the Muslims in such a manner as to compel persons entering the mosque (from whichever side) to tread on the hated idols and thus manifest their scorn for the old gods. It is perhaps permissible to conjecture that the *stelae* were, at the time when they were put to such ignominious and utilitarian use, still objects of veneration to some of the pagans of Harran.