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978-1-108-07710-1 - Narrative of a Journey to the Site of Babylon in 1811:

And Other Memoirs

Claudius James Rich

Excerpt

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JOURNEY TO BABYLON,

IN

THE YEAR 1811*.

December 9th.—SET out this morning on an expedition to visit the remains of Ancient Babylon, accompanied by Mrs. Rich, Mr. Hine, and some friends. Our escort consisted of my own troop of Hussars, with a galloper gun, a havildar, and twelve sepoy; about seventy baggage-mules, a mehmandar from the Pasha, and a man from the Sheikh of the Jirbah Arabs.

We left our encampment at Gherrara, or rather the opposite bank of the river, at half-past eight in the morning, Bagdad bearing from Gherrara N. 44 W., distant three miles. In order to get into the Hillah road we took a course 50 W., passing over a level country covered with small bushes. The canal of the Naher Malcha was in sight the whole of the morning. We passed over several artificial mounds, called the old bed of the Tigris. In two hours and a half we reached the road that leads from Bagdad to Hillah, after a march of seven miles, according to

* It was from this Journal that the following "Memoirs on the Ruins of Babylon" were composed.

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our rate of travelling. Kiahya Khan, which bore N. 12 E., was built by the celebrated Ahmed Kiahya of Bagdad; but being so near the town, it is not much frequented. Our road now lay S. 20 W., over a perfectly level country; and in about half an hour it took the direction of S. 5 W. At noon we arrived at Assad Khan, after a march of three hours and three quarters, or about eleven miles. These khans are built in quadrangular forms, with niches all round them for the accommodation of travellers, and a room or two near the gateway. In the centre of the court is a raised plinth, on which travellers sleep in the summer; and in the best khans there is an inner range of stabling all round the quadrangle. Over the gate is an open room, and there is always a small mud village round the khan. We only halted for a short time, in order to take some refreshment, and then proceeded on our journey. From a mound near Assad Khan the ruin of Aggher Koof, or Nimrod's Tower, bore N. 26 E.*

* *Bagdad, Saturday, January 4th, 1812.*—I went with a party to see Agger Koof, or Nimrod's Tower, as it is vulgarly called, a ruin of very great antiquity, and very much of the same character as those of Babylon. It stands on the west side of the Tigris, about six miles from Bagdad. The general resemblance of it with the Birs Nemroud struck me forcibly. Like that ruin, it has a mound of rubbish on the east side. The mass of the building is of unburnt bricks, mixed up with chopped reeds, and layers of reeds between every fifth or sixth layer of bricks. Fragments of burnt bricks are found in the base, which is *apparently* composed of the decayed bricks and rubbish, together with the dust blown up against it by the high wind. The mass is of an irregular shape, and about half way up it is an aperture, apparently of no great extent. Square holes are visible in the sides, as at the Birs. The

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We left Assad Khan at half-past twelve, and, after riding about three miles, our road bore S. 10 W., and Tauk Kesra became visible from a small eminence, bearing due east. We crossed the Naher Malcha, which was now dry, eight and a half miles further on. A little to the left of the road, on a high part of the bank, I observed a small ruin, which was visible from a great distance, called Sheikh Shoobar.

At three o'clock we came to a khan called Bironoos, from whence Tauk Kesra bore N. 66 E., our road to Iskenderia, a khan where we proposed halting for the night, being due south. About ten minutes to four we came to where the Musseib and Hillah roads join. Musseib is on the Euphrates, where there is a bridge on the road from Bagdad to Kerbela. Another khan was in sight on the Musseib road, called Mizrakjee Oghlou Khan, bearing S. 67 W. All this plain is covered with artificial

cement must have been mere mud: scarcely any is visible. The height of the ruin is 126 feet; the diameter of the largest and middle of it is 100 feet: the circumference of that part above the rubbish is 300 feet; the visible remains of the tower contain 100,000 cubic feet (Ives, p. 298). The lands or morasses about Nimrod produce annually, in corn, to the value of 50,000 or 60,000 piastres. They were once rented of government by Selim Aga, for the term of six years, for 18,000 piastres, which was nothing like their value.

April 17th, 1818.—The superfluous water of the Haour, or Morass of Nimrod, is received by the Masoudi canal, and carried into the Tigris below Bagdad. The dam of the Haour is now broken by the great press of the waters of the Euphrates, which is at present very high; and the water will cover all the country, and run into the Tigris on the Kazemeen road, between the village of that name and Bagdad.—*From Mr. Rich's Note-book.*

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mounds, and, probably, at some very remote period there was a town here.

We arrived at Iskenderia at a quarter past five, after a march of about fifteen miles. It is a large and handsome khan, built by Mahommed Hussein Khan, the present minister to the king of Persia, near the old one, which is now quite deserted. The bricks of which this new khan was built were dug up on the spot.

December 10th.—We left Iskenderia at ten minutes before eight in the morning: soon after leaving which, we observed the remains of an old canal, running in a slanting direction with the road, at about two miles distance*. At half-past ten, being two hours and twenty minutes, or about seven miles and a half from Iskenderia, we arrived at a very indifferent khan, called Hajee Suleiman, from the name of the person who built it.

We met here with a large caravan of camels loaded with rice, and going to Bagdad. I have often observed that camels have a very disagreeable smell, and that horses are naturally afraid of them. I mention this circumstance because some persons have asserted that camels have no smell, except when

* After a march of an hour and ten minutes I took the following sights:

Hajee Suleiman Khan bore S. 5 W. ;

Musseib, on the banks of the Euphrates, was in sight, at an angle of 60°, bearing S. 80 W. ;

Iskenderia bore N. 10 W. ;

The village of Naseria, S. 60 W.

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smear'd over with pitch or naphtha, after the casting of their coats. My own observations in this respect confirm the assertion of the old historians.

Hajee Suleiman Khan is distinguished from the surrounding mounds by a pillar over the gateway, which at a distance presents exactly the figure of a man. Near this khan there is a canal called Naher al Naseria, in which was water, and it had a bridge over it. I understand that many of the canals by which this country is intersected are full of water in the spring, when the Euphrates is at its height. The direction of our road was now 38 W.

About noon we reached Khan Mohawil, which is also a bad khan, and where we only halted for three-quarters of an hour, in order to take some refreshment. From this spot the grand mound among the ruins of Babylon was visible, bearing S. 5 E.*

Close to Mohawil was a canal, over which was a bridge. Soon after passing Mohawil, the country assumed the appearance of a morass; and, indeed, though it is now dry, I was informed that it was occasionally and partially covered with water. Several artificial mounds were in sight in different directions; especially the grand mound commonly supposed to be the Tower of Belus. Beauchamp calls this ruin Makloubè: but the inhabitants term it Mukelibè; or, according to the vulgar Arab pronunciation, Mujelibè, or overturned. Beauchamp in his description does not convey a correct idea of

* Musseib bore N. 15 W.; Naseria, N. 20 W.

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its grandeur ; but its appearance is very deceiving, from its great extent of base and perfectly level outline. At the top a person might conjecture it to be a comparatively insignificant mass. I rode to it, and my companions went up on horseback ; but before I had proceeded far up, my head grew completely giddy, and I was obliged, on this occasion at least, to give up the attempt. Great furrows are visible on its sides, and the whole surface, which is earth, is covered with broken pans and bricks, some of which have writing on them. Several deep holes or caverns were visible on the sides, near the top, and the angles present an appearance something like towers or bastions. The view from this interesting mound was very extensive.

Near Hillah I was met by a deputation from the Governor, who excused himself from not having come out in person to meet me, on the plea of sickness. He sent his band of double drums and zoornas, or Turkish hautboys ; and we proceeded through immense crowds of people to the town, where we arrived at four o'clock. The whole distance from Iskenderia to Hillah may be computed at about twenty-five miles. We took up our quarters in the house appointed for us by the Pasha of Bagdad, which was built by the late Ali Pasha for his own use.

December 11th.—I was visited early in the morning by the Governor. I inquired of him if there was any place in the vicinity of Hillah called Broussa or

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Bursa; but he was entirely ignorant of any such place, as indeed was every one else of whom I inquired; but he promised to make inquiries. Two bricks were brought to me with inscriptions: one of them was perfect, and had bitumen* on the back of it. The stamp was a long, narrow strip, different from those commonly found.

December 12th.—The Governor again called on me, and he brought me answers to all the questions I had proposed to him yesterday. He told me that below a place called Nebbi Eyoub there is a canal called Jazeria, close to which are two artificial mounds called Mokhalat and Adouar; and that to the west of the Birs Nemroud is an artificial mound called Towerij; besides which, four hours distant from Hillah, on the same bank of the river, but not close to it, he said there was a village called Jerbouia, and that near it is a place called *Boursa*, where are vestiges of ancient buildings, similar to those found at Babylon.

After he left me, I embarked in one of his boats, and tracked a little way up the river, while my people measured the eastern bank. I afterwards landed, and mounted my horse at the termination of the gardens which immediately surround the town. I rode up the river, along its banks, and through a village called Jumjuma. I observed on the opposite bank of the river artificial mounds, which are called Anana,

* I was not able to hear of any bitumen ever having been found in the vicinity of Hillah.

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and which, the natives told me, were the remains of an ancient town; but they could tell me nothing further. A little to the east I remarked a very great range of mounds, on which was a small mosque called Amran Ibn Ali, who, they pretended, was killed in this place. Here a man came up to me, of whom I purchased a large black stone, with figures and inscriptions on it*, of which I hope to give a fuller description elsewhere. I could not persuade him to tell me the exact place where he found this antique. These mounds were composed of loose earth, into which the horses' feet sunk sometimes knee-deep, and the surface, which exhibited a great deal of nitre, was covered with potsherds and pieces of brick. The rain had worn deep furrows, and the excavations were great, the people of the neighbourhood continually digging very deep in them, to find bricks for building, a great many of which have writing on them. After descending these mounds, we passed a winding road or ravine, about as broad as the Euphrates, and we came to another range, higher than the last in some places, where the people had excavated to the depth of more than ten feet. I saw evident vestiges of walls, composed of large bricks, which had all bitumen on the backs of them, and were placed on layers of mortar also. I observed no unburnt bricks or reeds. The mortar has become nearly as hard as the brick itself, and seems the same

* Now in the British Museum.—ED.

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as is used in the present day, which is called *Noora* or *Jos*. I found here written bricks. I am of opinion that the written bricks must have been laid with their faces outwards, as I never saw any with the smallest vestige of bitumen or cement of any kind on the face where the writing was. On this same range of mounds are deep ravines, or hollow ways, more than twenty feet deep. There are excavations made by those who dig for bricks, in all of which are vestiges of walls. Near there I saw the half of a large jar; the other half had been broken in digging. This jar was fixed in the wall, and near it were several bones, which easily pulverised between the fingers. Not far from this, I came to an excavation more than thirty feet deep, at the foundation of which was a canal full of water, over which was a floor laid of cement. This canal, which runs between the walls, was so deep that they say a horseman might ride through it. A little further on, on the same ravine, the walls on each side are extremely distinct: the face of the one on the south, or right hand, was clean and perfect, and between the layers was much mud. One of the bricks had writing on its external edge, they being here laid flat. The wall itself was extremely thick, the inner side of it not being visible, but buried in the rubbish. I think it could only have had a facing of the fine brick, as, near the top, it rises clear of the rubbish, and is only the thickness of one brick; and wherever it has been bored, the inside bricks are found to be infinitely smaller, and of

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an inferior quality to the exterior facing; but I did not meet with bricks merely dried in the sun. Great numbers of written bricks are found here. The height of these mounds greatly deceive one; from their immense extent, and gradual descent into the level plain, appearing much lower than they really are.

I met here with a man who had been sent from Bagdad, in order to superintend the repairs of the fortifications of Hillah; he had a number of Arabs at work digging out bricks, who were of great use to me in directing me to the most perfect vestiges of building. They took me to a place called the Kasr, or, according to their pronunciation, *Gusr*, or the Palace; in going to which we observed a continuation of the wall above mentioned, but without the external facing of fine brick—the cement appeared perfectly white. To the north is an old tree of greater apparent girth than any found in this country, and of which only the external surface of one side remains, and yet it is perfectly fresh and vigorous. The people told me they believed it had been there ever since the time of ancient Babylon—it seems a kind of *Salix*. Upon the opposite side I observed a great number of willows. About a hundred yards from the tree, which lies in the direction of N.N.E. from it, is the remarkable ruin called the Kasr or Palace—the parts which remain are as clean and perfect as if they had been just built. It corresponds exactly with the four points of the