

A PHANTOM CITY<sup>1</sup>

IN 1929 the French archæologists unearthed at Ras Shamra on the N. Phœnician coast the remains of a once famous city, Ugarit, and the story of the wonders there brought to light is familiar to many. Now there has come to light another and in some respects even more important city. Nearly opposite where the R. Khabour flows into the Euphrates (the "Chobar" of Ezechiel i.1, etc.) is a mound, Tell Hariri, where M. Parrot has been working since 1933. His report on his third campaign, December 1935 till March 1936, is full of interest. For here stood a mighty city on the Middle Euphrates, on a line drawn between the island of Cyprus and Ecbatana, and somewhat below Carchemish, which has now been identified as Mari, one of the eleven "cities of royalty" according to later scribes, and ranking with such well-known cities as Kish, Erech, Ur, Agade, etc. Previous to these excavations little was known of Mari, though the name of one of its rulers had appeared in an inscription, and it was also known that the famous dynasty of Isin had been founded by a Semite from Mari, c. 2180 B.C.

Up to date two main features have appeared: an immense palace and a series of superimposed temples of Ishtar. The last of these temples was destroyed by Hammurabi in a campaign conducted from his thirty-third to thirty-fifth year. Under it was an earlier, pre-Sargonic temple with an extraordinary wealth of ex-votos, etc., the whole surrounded by a wall. This temple is thought to have been destroyed by Eannadu of the dynasty of Lagash about 3,000 B.C. Beneath this again were two more sanctuaries, the earlier of which may go back to perhaps 3,100 B.C. and is noticeable for the care and perfection of the work. Two huge tombs of a later period had been dug in the debris of this earliest sanctuary. An earlier, even more primitive, sanctuary lay beneath the foregoing.

The palace is of even greater interest than the temples. By 1935 69 chambers had been laid bare covering some 5,000 square metres; by March 1936 the chambers

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<sup>1</sup> See SYRIA I, 1937.

excavated numbered 138; but it is estimated that as much again remains and it is hoped that further work will disclose the remains of a ziggurat or tower as at Ur and elsewhere. The palace has a series of great courts which lay open and thus provided light for the rooms, for no traces of windows have been discovered. One court measures fifty by thirty-three metres, and Plate XI (*Syria I*, 1937) shows the extraordinary height at which the walls still stand. At a later period the Assyrians seem to have restored some of the buildings, beneath which were found two cellars with huge jars over four feet in height and three-and-a-half feet in diameter. The inner walls were highly decorated and some of the remarkable frescoes will, it is hoped, be published shortly.

An interesting feature is the place assigned to religious functions in the palace as well as in the sanctuaries. So many are the apparent places for religious worship that M. Parrot himself is afraid lest he should be mistaken in regarding them as such. But the most important discovery was that of no less than 13,000 texts which will probably rival the Tell el-Amarna Tablets in historical importance. For here we have the correspondence between the last ruler of Mari, Zimrila, and his ambassadors, even with Hammurabi himself. Just as the Amarna letters show us Egypt struggling to retain her suzerainty over Palestine, so these letters show the struggle made by this quondam mighty city on the Middle Euphrates to withstand the great Babylonian First Dynasty and its king, Hammurabi. For there was no room for both these dynasties. Hammurabi could not afford to allow a city situated on the main traffic route between East and West to bar his approach to the North. So Mari had to go. How famous the city was and how the splendours of its palace were noised abroad appears from a letter addressed to Zimrila by Hammurabi: "To Zimrila say: thus saith Hammurabi, thy brother: The 'man' of Ugarit (Ras Shamra) has just written to me as follows: 'Describe to me the palace of Zimrila; for I am anxious to see it.' By this same courier I am sending you his son."

Space forbids any description of various other "finds," the statutory, the artistic moulds for 'confectionery' (?), the frescoes, etc. But there can be no doubt that when the

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literature unearthed is published it will revolutionize our ideas on the history of that remote period which antedates Abraham by some 1,500 years. Scarabs dating from the New Egyptian Empire, or from c. 1,580 B.C. onwards, show close commercial relations with Egypt, while it is becoming more and more evident that at a very early stage intimate relations existed between the Euphrates valley and India. The world was old indeed when Abraham came up from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran and thence into Palestine. It was already old when the great palace of Mari was built and—what is still more remarkable—its art was already showing signs of decay, precisely as in Egypt where the art of the Fourth Dynasty decays only to re-appear with the advent of the Twelfth c. 2,000 B.C.

Excavations have their tragedies. Before this last campaign at Mari had started, two of the staff, MM. François et Bianquis were killed in a motor accident, while two others were badly hurt.

The current number of *Syria*—remarkable as usual for its wonderful illustrations—has also a paper by Seyrig on Palmyra and its relations with Iran, while M. Chas. Viroleaud continues his publication of the *Phoenician Poem of the goddess Anat* discovered at Ras Shamra.

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