ASPECTS OF SUMERIAN CIVILIZATION DURING THE THIRD DYNASTY OF UR.

WITH EVIDENCE FROM TABLETS IN THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY.

By The Reverend T. FISH, Ph.D. (Cantab.).

II.—About Wool.

AN eminent Assyriologist told the writer that whenever he came across a Sumerian tablet of the kind published in the Catalogue,[1] he dropped it at once because "they are so deadly dull". And that might serve as one of the reasons why the tablets published in the Catalogue appeared without translations.

But though it is true that these small tablets are very dull in isolation, they improve when restored to their context; i.e. to the general class or subject with which they deal. They then appear as so many separate incidents in the very interesting story of local achievement. Each tablet does indeed tell of the efforts, day by day and year by year, of men and women and children who made the local raw material available for human use as food, clothing and shelter, for themselves and their contemporaries in south Mesopotamia during the Third Dynasty of Ur, i.e. about 2300 B.C. When put together and interpreted these tablets describe the working life of a society largely agricultural. They are records of land, its working and its produce; of animals and animal products; of simple industries working on the native basic materials.

The tablets come from different towns of Sumer; from Nippur in the north to Lagash in the south, with Umma close by

[1] *Catalogue of Sumerian Tablets in the John Rylands Library*, by T. Fish. 1932.

engaged him could not destroy it. The fragments of it lie strewn among his ruins.

As usual, Goethe, always master of himself in the end, exemplifies this quality in his art of living; he says little about it and leaves us to find it slowly for ourselves. Nietzsche drags it into the daylight and turns it this way and that, urging his fellowmen to sweeten the foundations of their lives, to unlearn their guilt and their fears, to accept things. Nietzsche is with the great teachers here. He will perhaps be read for this when his supermen and eternal recurrences are forgotten. "Denn eins ist noth: dass der Mensch seine Zufriedenheit mit sich erreiche" (V, 220), he says in that happy January of 1882—the Sanctus Januarius—and he says there also, "Ich will keinen Krieg gegen das Hässliche führen. Ich will nicht anklagen, ich will nicht einmal die Ankläger anklagen" (V, 209).

Here, if anywhere, is the starting-point for that conversation in the shades between Goethe and Nietzsche which all of us would be eager to hear, whether we hold it possible or not. The only certainty is that we cannot conduct it ourselves, but must leave it to them.

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Lagash and Drehem near to Nippur. Of these Nippur is the least known during this period. The others are well known: Lagash with its variegated labour, Umma predominantly agricultural, and Drehem whose tablets are almost exclusively animal memoranda as though the place served only as an animal depot at which every stage from the delivery to the final destiny of the animals was recorded and the record preserved in the local archive.

We shall be concerned in this article with one particular class of animals: the sheep and the goats; and with the special product of these: wool and hair. Our evidence will come almost exclusively from Lagash and Umma tablets, including some tablets from the Rylands collection. It is instructive that the Drehem tablets which are very numerous and contain numberless references to sheep and goats, are silent concerning wool and hair.

It is true to say that as soon as men began to write at all in Sumer they wrote about sheep. They continued to write about them throughout the long time during which the original picture passed into an unrecognizable group of wedges. And men of that same land are still writing of sheep to merchants of our own Bradford in Yorkshire. For they were in the recorded beginning and still are economic staples in that country. In the third millennium they are mentioned singly and in hundreds. Among the largest, if not the largest numbers quoted, during the Third Dynasty of Ur, are the following from Lagash:

7 flocks of ewes, rams, and goats belonging to a certain Ur^{d}Kadi and to the palace, totalling 2314.[1]

Another,[2] totalling 2259 sheep and lambs.

Largest[3] of all by far: 27,600 ewes, 17,084 sheep, and 9939 lambs.

Here to be sure is wool in abundance if men will but shear the sheep.

The Sumerian word for "to shear" is *ur*, semitic *ḫamamu*. The sign by which this word was represented is illuminating. It is the picture of a comb, complete with teeth and handle.

[1] Hussey, *Sumerian Tablets* (S.T.), II., no. 34. [2] *Ibid.*, no. 37.
[3] Invent. TDT., vol. iv. 7002.

This suggests that the wool or hair was plucked out rather than cut off. The operation is recorded on texts of *c.* 2800 B.C., but not often. Similarly on our tablets, about 500 years later, there are singularly few references to shearing.[1] But two of the references are very interesting. It is recorded [2] that 2259 sheep were shorn on one day during the third year of King Bur Sin; and 2314 on one day of his first year.[3] Both these Lagash and one Adab text [4] explicitly connect the wool supply with the shearing operation.

Occasionally the yield of wool from a specified number of sheep is given:

24 ewes, 29 male sheep, 5 female and 5 male lambs; their wool is 1 talent, 50 mina.[5]

5 ewes, 18 male sheep, 1 female lamb, 2 male lambs; their wool is 36 and 2/3 mina, 5 shekels.[6]

Total: 2 talents, 2½ mina of wool; its sheep are 24½.[7]

30 male sheep, their wool is 40 mina less 17 shekels.[8]

35 sheep, 41 goats, their wool/hair is 58 mina and 1/3.[9]

The weight of a mina at this period was *c.* 505 grammes. A mina was equal to 60 shekels; and 60 mina made a talent.

Unfortunately we have no data of this period to enable us to say for certain whether any special month was the month in which sheep were shorn.

At Adab sheep were shorn in the palace (*é-gal-la al-ur*). The Sumerian word for wool/hair, is *sig*, semitic *šipatu*. It was originally written pictographically as a piece of stuff across and down which lines, to represent threads, are drawn. Wool and hair were got from sheep and goats, of course. Sometimes the phrases "sheep's wool" [10] and "goat's hair" [11] are used but most frequently the word *sig* stands alone; it is rarely doubtful

[1] *Orientalia*, 47-49, no. 219; Lau O.B.T.R. no. 258: Inv. TDT. 1012, iv. 7764.

[2] Hussey, *l.c.* no. 37, R. 17.

[3] *Ibid.*, no. 34.

[4] Luckenbill, Inscriptions from Adab, no. 155.

[5] *Analecta Orientalia*, 7, no. 260, 9 f.

[6] *Ibid.*, no. 340, 13.

[7] Chiera, STA. 17, col. II, 22.

[8] Luckenbill, *l.c.* no. 155.

[9] Legrain, TRU. 188, 3.

[10] *E.g.* J.R. 598.

[11] *E.g.* at Lagash, cp. Invent. TDT., vol. iii. no. 5398; at Umma, cp. *Or.* 47-49, no. 462; at Drehem, cp. Legrain, TRU. 382, 9.

whether wool or hair is indicated. Goat's hair is never further differentiated, whereas wool is differentiated according to its colour, the kind of sheep whence it is derived, and the quality of garment in which it is used.

In point of colour, sheep were differentiated into *udu* simply and *udu gig*, that is black sheep. At a date earlier than Ur III, sheep were occasionally described as "white" (*udu babbar*);[1] this particular differentiation is seldom found on Ur III tablets.[2] It is said that at the present day black and browns largely predominate in southern Mesopotamia. In accordance with this colour variety of sheep, wool was occasionally differentiated, as black wool[3] and as white wool; but I think on one tablet only during Ur III.[4]

Sheep are occasionally[5] described as mountain sheep (*udu kur-ra*). Hence we read of "wool of mountain sheep"[6] or simply "wool of the mountain".[7] Sheep are described as *gi* sheep.[8] Does this fact help in the interpretation of *gi* wool, i.e. wool from *gi* sheep, bearing in mind what has just been noted, viz.: that mountain-sheep wool is sometimes written "mountain wool"? Unfortunately the meaning of *gi* in this context is obscure. Deimel suggests "gelbe" and Legrain "laine entière opposée à la laine déchirée par les épines" (*sig gir gul*).[9] The word *gi* in Temple Accounts most frequently means *reed*. It may therefore, in the phrases *gi*-sheep, *gi*-wool, mean sheep, wool of the colour of the reed. On a Lagash tablet[10] *sig* and *sig-gi* are used interchangeably. On another Lagash tablet[11] which records wool for various uses, the total wool is differentiated into good quality wool (*sig-šig*) and *gi*-wool.

[1] SAK., p. 48, 3 : 19.

[2] White *gukkal-sheep*, *Or.* 22, p. 19; skins of white sheep, *An. Or.* 7, p. 162.

[3] *Or.* 47-49, no. 291, 3; no. 296, 10; *Analect. Or.* 7, no. 319, 9; Legrain, TRU. 382.

[4] Luckenbill, *l.c.* no. 166, 2.

[5] See *Or.* vol. 22, p. 26; Inv. TDT., vol. iv. 7369.

[6] *Analect. Or.* 7, no. 262, 15.

[7] Legrain, TRU. 382; *Or.* 47-49, no. 173, etc.; Inv. TDT., vol. ii. 768, 1021.

[8] Inv. TDT., vol. iv. 7525.

[9] Sum. Lex. Heft 17, 539 : 29; Legrain, TRU., p. 77, n. 5.

[10] Hussey, *l.c.* no. 48.

[11] *Ibid.*, no. 5, Rev. col., II.

The use of wool in the making of garments is often mentioned; garments of all descriptions: new garments, royal garments, and less distinguished garments whose names are of obscure meaning.

Before we proceed to speak of wool as a thing of merchandise, it may be well to recall that our tablets are not private memoranda but are the account books of the business of *the* big business organization of the town. This was the Temple. The Temple was the centre not only of religion but of the business life of the community. Here was the Cathedral, the Town Hall, the Courts and the Exchange. Together these formed the Sumerian "temple". And because the tablets which have come down to us are concerned with Temple administration, they are called Temple Accounts. We might rightly call them Community Records, concerned not so much with private business as with business transacted by the Town Council whose duty was to supply the needs of the local shrines of gods and goddesses, to meet the demands of local administration and to contribute to the royal and national income by dues and taxes regularly collected and forwarded. The labour which this involved was admirably organized. It was checked, accounted for, and recorded by a system of book-keeping which seems to have had everything except "double entry". Most of our knowledge of contemporary administration is drawn from the "books" of the temple firm: invoices, bills, orders, wage lists, balance sheets. It is an interesting story which, perhaps, will one day be told in the BULLETIN. At the same time we must observe that these Temple Records are evidence of only one part of local business, viz.: public, or community business. They of necessity do not record the other part of the business activity, viz.: private transactions. That there were such is to be presumed and, in point of fact, is implied in the many legal decisions (*di-til-la*) of this period.

We may with reason presume that the Temple which had such large flocks, would have large quantities of wool. But one gets the general impression from the records of this time that Sumer consumed all that she produced of the basic wealth of the land: barley, oil and wool. It would seem that economically the situa-

tion may fairly be stated thus: the area of consumption was coterminous with the area of production.

Now in the matter of wool we know that it was used extensively to make clothing of various qualities and kinds. Also that it was payed out as wages (*sig-ba*) to couriers (*uku-us*),[1] clothiers (*lu-tug*)[2] and, as will be illustrated later, to weavers. It may be doubted whether, when all the obvious needs had been supplied, much would remain for use as merchandise. Yet there is explicit record of a shop where wool was sold (*é-sig-sum-ma*).[3]

Merchants and their wares are mentioned on the tablets, and it would be possible to make a list of the goods in which they traded. But here we need only consider the merchant and wool. I know of only one text of this time which records that merchants received wool; 130 talents 7 shekels of it.[4] A large quantity, to be sure. Three other tablets[5] give a long inventory of a merchant's stock. The amounts of wool therein listed are respectively: 19 talents, 13 mina; 7·2/3 mina, 5 shekels; 8 talents; and 20 talents, 1 mina. Clearly the evidence is scanty.

What of the price of wool, or its value in silver? Five tablets —all from Umma—furnish us with the value of wool at intervals during a period of twelve years. In chronological order the years and their data are:

(i) In the 46th year of Sulgi:
"10 shekels of silver; its wool (value) is 1 talent, 40 mina."[6]

(ii) In the 4th year of Bur Sin:
"7·2/3 mina, 5 shekels of wool (?) its silver (value) $4\frac{1}{2}$ shekels 26 she" (i.e. $\frac{2\,6}{1\,8\,0}$ shekels).[7]

(iii) In the 6th year of Bur Sin:
"8 talents of wool, the 5th year of Bur Sin, its silver (value) 5/6 mina, 3·1/3 shekels."[8]
"20 talents of wool, its silver (value), 2 mina."[9]
"1 mina of wool, its silver (value) 20 she."[10]

[1] STD. no. 101; Inv. TDT., vol. iii. 6359; *An. Or.* 7, no. 125, R21.
[2] Inv. TDT., vol. ii. 651.
[3] Inv. TDT., vol. ii. 902.
[4] Hussey, *l.c.* no. 158.
[5] Chiera, STA., nos. 1, 22 and 23.
[6] *An. Or.* I. no. 70, 1-3.
[7] Chiera, STA., no. 22, col. iii. 16.
[8] *Ibid.*, 23, I: 9.
[9] *Ibid.*, 23, I: 11.
[10] *Ibid.*, 23, I: 13.

(iv) In the 8th year of Bur Sin :

"19 talents 13 mina of wool, its money value 1½ mina 6 shekels (igi ?-gal ?) 15 she." [1]

(v) In the 3rd year of Gimil Sin :

"5 mina of *gi* wool, its value ½ shekel." [2]

From the above data it follows that in Shulgi 46 and Gimil Sin 3, 1 mina of wool was valued at 1/10 of a shekel of silver. So, too, according to one of three entries, in B.S.6. But in that same year of Bur Sin, some wool was valued at 1/9 of a silver shekel for 1 mina of wool. And in the eighth year of Bur Sin a mina of wool was valued at about 1/12 of a silver shekel. So that during those twelve years from Shulgi 46 to Gimil Sin 3, the value of wool remained fairly constant, moving between 1/9 and 1/12 of a silver-shekel per mina of wool. It is doubtful whether the entry under Bur Sin 4 is really of wool ; the sign is not clear in Chiera's copy which suggests obscurity on the original tablet. If it is wool, then in that year wool was of an exceptional value. Compared with the average for other years, viz. : 10 mina of wool for 1 shekel of silver, 7 3/4 mina of wool was valued at approximately 4·2/3 shekels of silver in the fourth of Bur Sin.

A Lagash tablet [3] records 8 ship loads of wool exported to Ur. Wool was worked by weavers, a distinct class attached to the Temple. Weavers are called *ushbar*, or, more usually *gim ushbar*. The latter name is a compound of *gim*, semitic *amtu*, a slave girl, and *ushbar*, whence the semitic *ishparu*, *ishpartu*, weaver. It would seem, therefore, that the females employed in the weaving industry were slaves. It is not certain that all the male weavers were.

One text [4] of this period from Umma reads :

Lugalazida, his price, 10 shekels of silver ;
Ninzaggisi 7 shekels,
Amakalla 7 shekels,
slave girls (and) slave of Lugalgarsie, steward of the weavers.

The names suggest that the first named is the male, and the two latter the female slaves ; the price suggests the same. If this

[1] Chiera, STA., I, 1 : 6.
[2] JR. 595.
[3] Inv. TDT., vol. ii. 916.
[4] STD. 215.

is a record of the purchase of slaves for the weaving industry, as it may well be, it is the only one of this period.

Another Umma tablet [1] reads :

" 30 qa Gim^{d} Enki, from the 2nd month to the 12th month, as weaver (*ush-bar-šù*), from Ur^{d}Numushda, Ludingirra has stored (*ni-dur*)." Even if this does not—and it probably does—refer to the wages (30 *qa*) of a weaver, other tablets give us some information of wages paid. Wages were paid in wool,[2] barley, dates, oil and fish. The amount of barley varies. Thus an undated tablet from Lagash [3] allows 40 *qa* of barley to the weavers and 20 *qa* to their children. Whereas another tablet [4] from Umma allows the weavers 30 *qa* daily.

Olive oil was paid out at the rate of 1 *qa*, *i.e.* about 1½ pints ; [5] only 1/6 of that amount was allowed according to another tablet ; [6] but, it must be added, in this instance the weavers received 5 *qa* of dates in addition to the oil.

Incidentally we have a side light on the number of weavers employed. During a period of 5 months, 6406 weavers were employed around Lagash. They are divided into districts : at Girsu there were 1051 ; at Kinurki Ninaki, 1143 ; at Tigabbaki there were 4272.[7] Whether these were 6406 distinct persons, or whether the total is of the number of weaver units engaged during all or part of that period, we cannot say. In this connection it is of interest to quote a report on some as yet unpublished tablets found at Ur during the Excavations of 1924-25 : [8]

" We found a very large collection of unbaked clay tablets dating from the last days of the Third Dynasty of Ur . . . the most interesting records deal with the industrial side of the establishment. . . . The main industry illustrated by the tablets found this season was weaving. In the building E-karzida alone 165 women and girls were kept at work, and we have the accounts made out for the month, quarter and year of the quantity

[1] STD., 196.
[2] Reisner, TU. 162, col. x. 21.
[3] Inv. TDT., vol. iv. 7378.
[4] *Or.* 47-49, no. 361.
[5] Hussey, *l.c.* no. 3, iv. 5, 6.
[6] Reisner, TU. 164[19], (amount per head calculated from total).
[7] Hussey, *l.c.* no. 3, iii. 21 f. (The separate totals when added together give 6466 !).
[8] *Antiq. Journal*, Oct. 1925, p. 395.

of woollen thread supplied to each and of the amount of cloth produced, each sort distinguished by quality and weight with due allowance for the wastage of thread in weaving. The rations are in proportion to the output, the older women receiving less than the young ones—no more in fact than did the younger children; thus if four pints of oil a day was the standard allowance for adults, children of different ages got two pints one and a half or one, and the really old woman one also. The tablets of which Mr. Wooley speaks appear to illustrate the woollen industry more fully than do any others of this time.

The weavers were organized under a steward (*pa*) who was himself under a higher official, the *nubanda*, or overseer. Some indications, confessedly vague, seem to suggest that the steward attended to the work and the overseer to the payment of the weavers.

At Lagash the weavers had an establishment of their own the *é-ushbar*, i.e. the weaver-house. It may be that no special importance is to be attached to the fact that an establishment of that name is not found on any tablets of this period from Nippur, Umma or Drehem. On the other hand it may be that the quantity of woollen workers and woollen goods turned out at Lagash was so great as to necessitate special accommodation for the industry. Certainly the quantity at Lagash is far in excess of that recorded from Umma, its near neighbour and in point of information re wool, its rival.

In the *é-ushbar* there were employed not only the weavers but also the clothes makers (*lu tug*)[1] and the *ne-sig-ga*.[2]

Here, too, clothes were fulled (*tag*, semitic *mahasu*, to strike) and bleached in the *ki mu ra* or laundry.[3]

It would appear that the King Gimil Sin had his own *é-ushbar*.[5] Also that there was one which was known as the *é-ushbar* of Lama Gimil Sin in Girsu. The steward of his a Lu-Limmasu, who was also the steward of the weaver-house of Gimil Sin.[6] Was the King's name Gimil Sin an abbreviation

[1] Inv TDT, vol iii 5184. [2] *Ibid*, vol iv 7000.
[3] *Ibid*, vol ii 9743; 3413; cp RA 1919, p 3
[5] Inv TDT, vol ii nos 844 3413. vol v 7000
[6] *Ibid*, vol ii 909 col iv and cp vol ii 34 3

of Lama Gimil ^{d}Sin ? No other persons are associated so closely with the *é-ushbar*. And both these names are coupled with slave girl weavers: *gim ushbar* ^{d}*Gimil* ^{d}*Sin* [1] and *gim ushbar* ^{d}*Lama* ^{d}*Gimil* ^{d}*Sin*.[2] So also, though but once, is the patesi (of Girsu ?) on a tablet [3] which records an allowance of fish for the slave-girl weavers of the patesi.

We may infer from the data of Lagash tablets that every town and village had its weavers. There is express mention on the Lagash tablets [4] of the weavers of Lagash, Kisurra, Uru, Nina and Tigabba. We meet them too on Umma and Adab tablets, and, according to Mr. Wooley's report, they were at Ur in large numbers.

It would be interesting to know in detail the processes of fulling, bleaching, weaving and tailoring. But the tablets of the Third Dynasty of Ur do not provide them.

Attached to the weaver-house at Lagash or district was an archivist.[5] It is to him and his like that we owe whatever knowledge we possess of wool and its uses in their day.

[1] Inv. TDT., vol. ii. nos. 702, 848, 3143.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. ii. 798, 909, col. iv. [3] *Ibid.*, vol. ii. 4203, R.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. ii., nos. 790, 794; no. 752; no. 790; no. 794; no. 913, etc.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. ii. 728.