THE HEAD OF THE OLDEST STATUE OF A SEMITE.

BY EDGAR JAMES BANKS.

It has long been the popular supposition that Babylon and the still older cities of Babylonia are the original centers of Semitic life. Although the Hebrews were a colony from the southern Babylonian city of Ur, and other Semitic emigrations from Babylonia may have taken place, it has for some time been known that the Semites were not the first dwellers of Mesopotamia. The first evidences of their presence in the valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates come from about 3800 B. C., when Sargon, a Semite, conquered the earlier inhabitants who are known as the Sumerians, occupied their cities, and adopted among other things of their civilization the cuneiform system of writing and apparently their religion. For centuries these two peoples of a totally different type seemed to have lived side by side until the Sumerians were absorbed. Previous to the third millennium B. C. Sargon and his son Naram Sin are the only Semites who stand out prominently in the world’s early history, and a number of their inscriptions have survived, but who these conquering Semites were, whence they came, and the early history of their Babylonian occupation has remained in such obscurity that scholars have advanced the wildest theories to explain that the Semites and the non-Semitic Sumerians, in spite of the fact that they employed different languages, were the same people. The excavation of Bismya has thrown new and valuable light upon early Semitic history.

From the pre-Semitic Sumerians an abundance of inscriptions and sculptures have appeared. The oldest statue in the world, that of King David, which I discovered at Bismya, shows the Sumerians to have belonged to a straight-nosed, stout race of people who shaved their heads and faces, and who wore as their only garment a short
skirt about the loins. A dozen similar statues from about 2800 B. C. were found at Telloh, and a number of statuettes have fixed the Sumerian type.

The excavations at Bismya yielded many inscriptions from the time of Sargon and Naram Sin, and among them are ordinary business documents written in the Semitic language. They are therefore the earliest Semitic documents known, coming from the time of the

**USUAL TYPE OF A NON- OR PRE-SEMITIC OR SUMERIAN HEAD FROM BISMYA.**

(Photograph by Dr. Banks.)

appearance of the Semites in the world's history. One of the documents, which is a receipt for sesame seed, in four lines, reads:

150 measures of sesame seed of Agadi (Akkad)
Nezaza
has received
at Ud-num-ki (Bismya).

Another discovery of still greater interest to the student of Semitic history was made at Bismya. A workman while excavating along the south-west edge of the ruin of the Bismya temple, struck
a hard substance with his pick. Taking it up, he began to brush away the dirt, and a magnificently preserved marble head appeared.

The face, unlike anything before discovered in Babylonia, is thin and covered with a mustache and a pointed beard of a strikingly
Semitic shape. The eyes are large and well formed, and ivory eyeballs were, when found, still held in place by the bitumen in which they were originally imbedded, but the stones representing the pupils of the eyes are missing. The nose is specially Semitic. The body, with the possible exception of the small fragment of a shoulder, was not recovered.

The heads of the other statues from Babylonia, all beardless and hairless, are of an entirely different type; they are known to be Sumerian. This head is not Sumerian; the Semitic features, the fact that it was found with various Semitic inscriptions, and in a city occupied by the earliest Semitic kings, points unmistakably to the conclusion that we have the head of a Semite.

The name of the early Semite which the head represents will probably never be known, nor the exact age at which he lived. A few years ago scholars would have said that the excellence of its art would point to a date late in Babylonian history, but now the same argument must be used in favor of an early date. Although inscriptions of Naram Sin, and bricks of Sargon were found near the head, one would not be justified in saying that the statue represents one of them, yet its location when found points to a date previous to the third millennium B. C. This much is certain: the head represents the only early Babylonian statue of a Semite, and the oldest Semitic statue in the world.