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ALBERT T. CLAY AND HIS BABYLONIAN COLLECTION

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When Yale president Arthur Twining Hadley was ushered into J. Pierpont Morgan's study at the Morgan Library in New York City, at 4 o'clock on November 3, 1909, visions of benefactions surely danced in his head. Yale had bestowed an honorary doctorate of laws on Morgan in June, 1908; the great financier had dined with the Hadleys in New Haven, so they had met before. A telegram from Morgan, sent the previous Saturday, had invited him; "If you should be in New York some day soon I should be glad to see you for a few moments at my Library. Kindly let me know a day or two in advance so that I shall not miss you. J. Pierpont Morgan." As it happened, Hadley's normally full calendar fell open, so he telegraphed accordingly, and got an answer back from Morgan the next afternoon, "Wed four o'clock Library will suit me. J. P. Morgan."² During the train trip to New York, Hadley must have been aglow with the possibilities and perhaps rehearsed some appropriate expressions of gratitude for this mark of attention from one of the world's richest men, head of the first billion-dollar corporation in history at a time \$4000 was a handsome annual salary for a professor.

Hadley, Yale's first modern president, was a political economist, author of an incisive, award-winning book on railroads, not to mention a standard economics textbook.³ Yale, fresh from its bicentennial in 1901,

1. I dedicate this study to my former classmate and departmental colleague, Gary Beckman, in grateful recognition of his outstanding service as assistant then associate curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, 1978–1997.

2. Yale Archives, Yale Record Group (YRG) 2-A Record Unit (RU) 25, Series I Box 61 folder 1210, hereafter "Hadley" (note that page numbers read in reverse).

3. R. D. French, *DAB* 8: 77–80; Morris Hadley, *Arthur Twining Hadley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

was developing rapidly under Hadley's brilliant leadership. By the time of his retirement in 1921, the College and the Graduate School had been strengthened, there was a new School of Forestry, a University Press, a *Yale Review*, Yale-in-China, plus an array of new buildings, including a vast concert hall, six laboratories, the School of Music, the Bowl and Armory, a carillon tower, and two undergraduate quadrangles. In short, Hadley was presiding over the creation of a great twentieth-century university, and he no doubt had some definite ideas about how Morgan's beneficence could best be directed.⁴

After the preliminaries, Morgan came to the matter at hand: his desire was to create an endowment large enough to sustain a professorship of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature at Yale and to create a collection of Babylonian antiquities. Moreover, he had in mind the man he wished to see appointed to this new position, whom Hadley had probably never heard of. One can only imagine the sting of disappointment that must have crept over the university president as he listened to this proposal and mustered the requisite enthusiasm, his own shopping list of gifts now only a sad memory.

It seems a safe assumption that Hadley could not have contemplated Babylonian literature as a subject he wanted to see developed at Yale. He believed "Semitic Languages and Literatures" were well if not over-represented at Yale by the incumbent professor, Charles C. Torrey, and various biblical scholars in the Divinity School. Despite his extraordinary abilities and accomplishments, Hadley had no reason to be interested in Babylonian literature. The only essay he was likely ever to have read on the subject was his father's attack on the "imposture" of Ibn Wahshiyya's book of Nabataean agriculture, scarcely a promising introit to ancient Near Eastern studies.⁵

Assyriology had briefly flourished at Yale in the William Rainey and Robert Francis Harper era but had shrunk to an occasional Akkadian course with the departure of the Harpers to Chicago in 1891. Hadley would have remembered well the excitement for the ancient Near East that the Harpers had aroused, followed by the letdown and sense of betrayal when the Harpers left town forever. An early task of Hadley's presidency

4. Arthur Twining Hadley, "Twentieth Century Yale," in *The Book of the Yale Pageant 21 October 1916*, ed. George Henry Nettleton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), 119–21.

5. Benjamin R. Foster, "The Beginnings of Assyriology in the United States," in *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible*, ed. Steven W. Holloway, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 26–27.

had been to repair the damage, which he did with the appointment of Torrey in 1899, albeit at a low salary.

Assyriology had, moreover, a poor reputation. Hadley must have been aware of the flap caused by Friedrich Delitzsch's impious lectures on Babylon and the Bible.⁶ He had surely heard of the Hilprecht Controversy, a dispute that broke out in 1903 over the veracity of Hermann Hilprecht, Clark Professor of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania. Hilprecht had even published a book about it in 1908.⁷ There was, perhaps, a general notion that German Assyriologists, at least, were prone to make absurd claims for the importance of their discipline, and the two leading Assyriologists in the United States, Paul Haupt and Hilprecht, were Germans.⁸

Hadley's reflections, therefore, as he rode the train back to New Haven, must surely have been more of an opportunity lost than of an exciting new undertaking. He could not have imagined that the Yale Babylonian Collection, in its own quiet style, was destined to outlast the greatest corporations of the day Hadley knew so well, including the Pennsylvania and the New York and New Haven railroads. When he informed Torrey of this unexpected development, Torrey was stunned, even contemplated resignation from the Yale faculty. For a decade he had pressed for expansion of his department in vain, but had never asked for an Assyriologist. When he had the promise of a gift to expand on Semitic instruction, Hadley had declined it.⁹ So much, then, for the enthusiastic reception for a professorship of Assyriology and a Babylonian Collection at Yale.

Morgan's formal offer was dated January 3, 1910, at 23 Wall Street, New York:

6. Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire, Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 244–49.

7. Foster, *ANB* 10: 825–27.

8. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des alten Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 306: "teilweise maßlose Selbstüberschätzung."

9. Torrey's private diary, present whereabouts unknown. Torrey was eager to have the chair at Harvard vacated by the retirement of Toy, but Harvard had made no move, and he was ambivalent about his situation at Yale (correspondence in Hadley Series I Box 88 folder 1762). Torrey called the new professorship a "thunderclap out of a clear sky" (November 6, 1909) and noted that a Semitics instructor could be had for \$700–800 a year. Hadley worked hard to placate him (Hadley to Torrey, November 4 and 9, 1909, Series II Box 115, pp. 154, 179–77). Penn countered by offering Clay a professorship, November, 1909.

Arthur T. Hadley, LL.D., President,
Yale University Corporation
New Haven, Conn.

Dear Sir:

In accordance with our conversation, I beg to confirm what I then said to you, and that was, my wish to endow in Yale University a professorship to be known as the "William M. Laffan Professorship of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature." With this object in view, I am prepared to transfer to your Corporation one thousand shares of United States Steel Corporation Preferred stock, the income of which is seven thousand dollars per annum. My desire would be that the Corporation should first meet the salary of the professor—say \$5,000.—and that the balance should be applied yearly to securing for the University (or the University Library, as it saw fit) specimens of tablets, cylinders, and other illustrations of the period, available for the use of the professor for the time being in his Department, it being understood that, pending the securing of such specimens, I should be glad to place at the disposal of the professor such access to my specimens in my Library in this city that they might require.

It is my desire that Mr. Albert Tobias Clay, Ph.D., at present in the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, should be offered the first professorship.

Upon receiving your official notification of acceptance of this endowment, I shall be prepared to forward to you a certificate of stock.

Faithfully yours,

J. Pierpont Morgan

Hadley's response was suitably enthusiastic:

Jan 4th 1910

My dear Sir: -

I acknowledge, with great pleasure, the receipt of your letter of January third, which I shall communicate to the Yale Corporation at its meeting next week Thursday. Official notification of the acceptance of this gift will at that time be returned in full and complete shape.

I take pleasure in saying in advance of such official action that the Corporation has been informed of the plan at the previous meeting, and expressed the warmest interest in the general project and hearty approval of the arrangements made for carrying it out.

I shall at once communicate with Dr. Clay regarding the appointment to the professorship.

Pray accept the assurance of my own very great appreciation, not only of the gift itself, but of the spirit which moved you to carry out a plan of this kind at a time when your other duties were so onerous and the burdens connected with them so heavy.

Faithfully yours,

Arthur Twining Hadley

Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan
23 Wall St.
New York, NY

Two days later, Hadley wrote to Clay offering him the professorship, "with a yearly compensation of \$5,000, of which \$4,500 should be regarded as salary and \$500 additional should be used to defray incidental expenses – travel, stenography, etc. The balance of \$2,000 would then be available for the purchase of specimens, as contemplated."¹⁰ A veteran of modern appointment procedures may feel surprise that a donor could identify a candidate for a position and that the appointment could be so rapidly completed. Morgan must have been nettled and Hadley mortified when the Yale Corporation's official response got his name wrong, calling him James rather than John.¹¹

How Clay became acquainted with Morgan remains unknown. He was a friend of William Hayes Ward, a leading dealer and collector of cylinder seals, who counted Morgan among his best customers, as well as, possibly, of John D. Prince, a Semitist and Assyriologist, later diplomat, who had been a schoolmate of Morgan's son. There were plenty of eager connoisseurs of ancient art under Morgan's patronage, but none so well qualified as Clay to publish Morgan's growing collection of cuneiform

10. Hadley Series II Box 115, pp. 465–64, January 6, 1910.

11. King to Hadley January 4, 1910 (above, note 1), citing Yale Corporation Minutes 14 January and 21 February 1910.

tablets. Perhaps Ward recommended him.¹² About 1901, Clay began to commute from Philadelphia to New York to catalogue and publish the Morgan tablet collection. His dynamic personality, disarming enthusiasm, and vigorous good looks always won him favor, and America's leading banker, a shrewd judge of men, came to the conclusion that Clay was the most promising young American Assyriologist of his day. Hilprecht, who thought so too, had campaigned hard to create a position for Clay at Penn, but Clay chafed under Hilprecht's autocratic style, even as he learned, under Hilprecht's tutelage, to be a first-rate epigrapher.¹³

The choice of Yale for Morgan's benefaction was presumably his own idea. The University of Pennsylvania and Johns Hopkins were out, as they already had established programs in Assyriology and, in the case of the University Museum, a large tablet collection. Harvard already had a major New York donor, Jacob Schiff, and a Semitic Museum. For reasons obscure, Morgan, like Schiff, took little interest in Columbia, which had a small collection of tablets and a Semitics faculty, but no Assyriologist of Clay's competence and energy; even James B. Nies (Columbia '82), who had willed his choice 12,000-piece collection to his alma mater, was to change his will in 1922 in favor of Yale.¹⁴ Perhaps Columbia's tendency to rely on Jewish donors for its Semitics program had something to do with this; perhaps worse, Columbia had even dared to compete with Morgan on the New York antiquities scene. Yale's honorary degree no doubt helped, and the desire to honor Laffan was surely motivated by his death in 1909.¹⁵

William Laffan (1848–1909) was a journalist who, after working in San Francisco and Baltimore, settled in New York in 1877, initially as drama critic for the *New York Sun*. He acquired full control of the newspaper in 1902 with Morgan's assistance. The two worked closely together to build up the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which Laffan became a trustee in 1905 (after Morgan became president in 1904). One of Morgan's principal artistic advisors, Laffan oversaw the purchase and transportation of numerous artworks from Europe to the United States. He himself was a noted artist (*Engravings on Wood*, 1887) and an authority on Chinese ceramics (*Oriental Ceramic Art*, 1897) and had just published Morgan's personal collection (*Catalogue of the Morgan*

12. For Ward, see Foster, "Beginnings of Assyriology," 52–54; for his relationship to Morgan, Bruce Kuklick, *Puritans in Babylon, The Ancient Near East and American Intellectual Life 1880–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 107.

13. Foster, *ANB* 4: 17–18.

14. Codicil to Last Will and Testament of James Buchanan Nies, February 27, 1922.

15. Kuklick, *Puritans in Babylon*, 107–8.

Collection of Chinese Porcelains, 1907). Perhaps under Clay's spell, Laffan may have become interested in funding an expedition to Mesopotamia, but any such plans were cut short by his death. Clay treasured the memory of Laffan's "friendship and kindness."¹⁶ "Highly honored" and "very grateful," Clay arrived in New Haven determined to make Yale the leading center of Assyriology in the United States.¹⁷

The first task, as Clay saw it, was to create a museum, on the order of the University Museum in Philadelphia and the Semitic Museum in Cambridge. Clay's vision of this was a "Museum of Oriental antiquities, illustrating the ancient cultures of Syria, Palestine, Babylonia and Assyria, and Egypt."¹⁸ Yale was in fact in the midst of a major building program. Clay raised the issue even before he arrived. Like other American universities, Yale had many collections: autographs, artillery, botanical specimens, coins, minerals, musical instruments, stuffed birds, fossils, Greek and Roman vases, as well as Peruvian, Syro-Arabian, Japanese, and Aegean objects. A museum for all this pelf was desirable, but when planning for one commenced in 1921, the outcome was a museum of "Natural History," which included Egyptian objects, even a handful of tablets, but not Clay's "Oriental antiquities."

New Haven, a small, comparatively poor city, could boast no such concentration of wealthy and public-spirited citizens as did Philadelphia, where local benefactors put up the funds for a magnificent museum and supported its activities and expeditions; nor, despite Clay's hopes for a "Lenier" or "Pierpont Oriental Museum," did any individual wealthy donor on the level of Jacob Schiff at Harvard or Caroline Haskell at Chicago stand forward to provide the funds needed to realize such a project.¹⁹

In the meantime, Clay began instruction in Assyriology and set to buying tablets and inscribed objects with a will. No doubt from his

16. For Laffan, F. O'Brien, *DAB* 10: 539–40; Clay's comment is in a letter to Anson Stokes, Secretary of the University, March 15, 1910 (YRG 4-A RU 49 Box 23 Folder 302, hereafter "Stokes").

17. Clay to Hadley January 9, 1910, in Stokes. Yale awarded Clay an honorary MA in May, 1910 so he could be a Yale alumnus.

18. Clay to Stokes, 1913, undated memo. Yale had a proto-Babylonian Collection as early as 1817, when a certain Captain Henry Austin brought bricks inscribed in Elamite and Akkadian to the USA, and evidently presented them to Yale, though no Yale record of them has been found (Foster, "Beginnings of Assyriology," 46). For the Yale Assurnasirpal reliefs, see Sam B. Harelsan, *Asia Has Claims Upon New England: Assyrian Reliefs at Yale* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2006).

19. Clay to Stokes, April 15, 1911; Mr. Lenier, whose identity remains uncertain, had left the country on his private yacht when Clay was ready to approach him.

experiences in New York, he knew the market well. "In order to secure choice material as the Arabs excavate it, I have endeavoured to have Bagdad dealers and their agents ship the inscriptions directly to New Haven, so that European Assyriologists would not be able to pick out the choice things."²⁰ In 1913, three large lots of tablets arrived in New Haven, two totaling 1400 from Uruk (the Eanna archive), including 125 letters, some royal, and one lot of 1300 from Larsa. The asking price was \$8500, but Clay thought that a war chest of \$5000 would be enough, as chaffering was part of the game.²¹ By the end of that year, he had bought over six thousand tablets: "If Penn Univ does not secure new material I assure you, if all goes well, that we will have the first collection in the country before long."²²

Since the budget provided by Morgan was nowhere near sufficient to finance such a buying spree, Clay resold portions of his acquisitions to raise money for more, and did his best to drum up interest at Yale. Alumni "grow enthusiastic if some attention is paid to them"; so the Collection was open at Commencement, and people gave small objects, books, and curiosities. But prices for good pieces were high. The asking price for a stele of Rim-Sin's queen (YOS 9 31), \$5000 in 1914, dropping to \$2000 in 1916, still exceeded what Morgan had thought needed for a year to accumulate a working collection. The going price for cheaper tablets was \$3–5, for better ones \$5–10, more what Morgan had in mind.²³

Yale's secretary, Anson Stokes, supported the undertaking, earning Clay's gratitude: "I greatly appreciate your interest and encouragement in my work. With only a few students and few besides yourself to show any interest, it had been, until recently, rather a peculiar existence as far as my work is concerned."²⁴ Lectures on archaeology were poorly attended and not many viewed the exhibits. One of Clay's strangest fund-raising ideas was to assemble representative third-millennium tablets in specially made boxes (a sample of which he sent to Stokes) to present, at Yale's expense, to

20. Clay to Stokes, January 8, 1913.

21. Clay to Stokes, January 8, 1913.

22. Clay to Stokes, December 13, 1913.

23. Clay to Stokes, November 12, 1913; December 4, 1916. F. J. Stephens, "The Babylonian Collection," *Yale University Library Gazette* 19 (1945) 45 states that Clay received help from alumni and friends of Yale to buy tablets and that by 1915 Yale held eight thousand tablets and other antiquities; so also a leaflet, "The Yale Babylonian Collection," *Collections of Yale University* 2; F. J. Stephens, "History of the Babylonian Collection," *Yale University Library Gazette* 36 (1962) 126–32.

24. Clay to Stokes, December 3, 1913.

Connecticut high schools; he proposed initially fifty such sets, for which the Collection would be paid \$7.00 each, but nothing came of it.²⁵

A research library was also required. Through the generosity of Edward Salisbury, America's first professional Orientalist,²⁶ the Yale Library already owned many of the most important early publications of Mesopotamian exploration and philology; Clay set out to create by purchase and donation a "Babylonian Seminary" that was to be both complete and up to date. G. B. Gordon, Director of the University Museum, presented to it a full set of that institution's publications in Assyriology, Egyptology, Aegean studies, and the Museum Journal. Mary Montgomery Borglum, the first woman to earn a doctorate in Assyriology, gave the reference works of her student years in Germany, including Brünnow's Sumerian sign list.²⁷ Much of the burden of the library fell on Clay's assistant, Ettalene M. Grice, who did the ordering and typed the file cards.²⁸

Clay founded three cuneiform text publications and one research series, all through the newly established Yale University Press. *Babylonian Records in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan (BRM)* was intended for the Morgan Library tablets (MLC), some of which, such as the fragment of Atrahasis, he edited separately in *A Hebrew Deluge Story in Cuneiform and Other Epic Fragments in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, YOSR 5/III (1922). Nies's bequest of his own collection stipulated that it be kept as a separate entity (NBC) and provided funds for both acquisition and publication, so a second series was begun, *Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of J. B. Nies (BIN)*, originally intended solely for Nies tablets. A third, *Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts (YOS)*, in older publications *YBT*, was originally intended for tablets and inscriptions in the Yale Babylonian Collection per se (YBC). By the mid-twentieth century, related tablets from the various collections were freely combined in individual volumes. Such were Clay's energies that he found the time to prepare three volumes in *BRM*, one in *BIN* (posthumous), and two in *YOS*, including literary and scholarly works, inscriptions of all periods, and large tablet groups of the Old Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Hellenistic periods. He also contributed five volumes to the *Researches*, including the first publication of the Yale Gilgamesh tablet.

25. Clay to Stokes, November 12, 1913.

26. For Salisbury, see Foster, *ANB* 19: 206–8.

27. Clay to Stokes, January 9, 1914; for Mary Montgomery (Borglum), see Foster, "Beginnings of Assyriology," 61–63.

28. For Grice, Foster, "Beginnings of Assyriology," 65–68.

Clay's students were expected to publish tablets too, so the Collection workroom was the scene of intense epigraphic and research activity under his aegis, yielding more than ten additional text volumes and studies in as many years: Keiser, *BRM* 3 (1914), *BIN* 1 (1917), *YOS* 4 (1919), *YOSR* 4/II (1919); *BIN* 2 (1920); Lutz, *YOS* 2 (1917); Grice, *YOS* 5 (1919), *YOSR* 4/I (1919); Dougherty, *YOS* 6 (1920), *YOSR* 5/II (1923); Tremayne, *YOS* 7 (1925), plus various others that did not materialize. His student, R. P. Dougherty, created yet another series, *Goucher College Cuneiform Inscriptions (GCCCI)*, also published by the Yale University Press, the first volume of which appeared in 1923. The earliest volumes were produced by etching the pen-and-ink image onto a lead plate, then nailing the plate to an oak block, from which the images were printed. Later, direct reproduction of the drawings was done by various photographic processes. Clay yearned for a publication fund, as a text volume cost about \$800 to produce and already in 1913 he had ten volumes in mind that he wanted to see published. Inspired by Penn's *Publications of the Babylonian Section* and *Babylonian Expedition* series, Clay at first envisioned volumes by category: historical, liturgical, prayers and hymns, contracts, divination, mathematical, and temple archives.²⁹

Housing was a serious problem. The Collection had rapidly outgrown its small initial quarters in Edwards Hall (Elm and College Streets, now demolished) and the Oriental Museum had not been built. While in a recruiting mode in January 1910, Hadley had suggested the Osborn Zoological Laboratory as a possibility. Finally in December, 1917, Ross Granville Harrison, Professor of Zoology, perhaps with a nudge from Hadley, offered Clay "two rooms on the second floor of the laboratory, one a larger room 36 x 20' and the other a small one ... for the rest of the academic year."³⁰ There the Collection was to remain for the next dozen academic years, until it was moved into the new Sterling Memorial

29. Clay to Stokes, January 8, 1913.

30. Yale Archives, Ross Granville Harrison Ms Group 263 Series IV Box 42, December 15, 1917; Hadley to Torrey, January 17, 1910: "I feel quite certain that we shall have in the immediate future a far better place for exhibiting our collections of antiquities ... we can have such a readjustment of class rooms as to make it possible to use a large part of Osborn Hall for exhibition purposes ..." (Hadley Series II Box 115 p. 519). The rooms were splendidly fitted out with display cases and drawers for the tablets. Casts of reliefs and objects in the British Museum and Louvre were presented by Morgan.

Library, even before the books, “where it will have accommodations and facilities under ideal surroundings.”³¹

Clay’s other activities in these heady times included the Mesopotamia Committee, originally part of the Archaeological Institute of America. This was intended to launch a new American expedition to Iraq and to found an American school there on the model of the American School in Jerusalem. Ever mindful of his Babylonian Collection, Clay saw the post-war mandates as an opportunity for American archaeology. The autumn of 1919 found him, therefore, in Paris, lobbying the American ambassador to secure modification of the treaty language referring to archaeological access, which had been drawn up without consulting any archaeologists. The French and Americans could find common cause in this, as they were both worried that the British, who were likely to end up with Palestine and already had Iraq, would exclude others from digging in their mandates.³²

Clay then pushed on to Jerusalem, as annual professor at the American School there, where he founded a Palestine Oriental Society, modeled on the American Oriental Society, as well as a scholarly journal for it.³³ In the midst of this, Clay eagerly planned the first of two trips to Mesopotamia, where he hoped Yale could send an expedition, as soon as conditions permitted, and planned to set up the American School, endowing it with a library he was bringing from the United States.³⁴

There were conflicting goals for the expedition. On the one hand, Clay wanted tablets. Larsa and Uruk had yielded many to the Babylonian Collection, so the prospects were alluring to begin work at either of those sites. On the other, Clay wanted to prove his lifelong thesis about the importance of Amorite civilization. Hence he wanted to explore and choose a site along the Euphrates from the Habur River to Hit, because, “In my judgment remains of the earliest Semitic civilization, comparable in antiquity with anything found in Egypt and Babylonia, will be discovered in this part of Mesopotamia; up to the present not a single site has been

31. YRG 4-A RU 49 Series IV Box 335 Folder 714, Annual Report of Raymond P. Dougherty, June 1930: “The Yale Babylonian Collection completed the year by moving into its new quarters in the Sterling Memorial Library Building....”

32. Benjamin R. Foster, “On the Formal Study of Near Eastern Languages in America, 1770–1930,” in *U.S.-Middle East, Historical Encounters*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus T. Bernhardsson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 31–33.

33. Foster, “Formal Study,” 33.

34. Foster, “Formal Study,” 32; A. T. Clay, “Inauguration of the Bagdad School,” *BASOR* 13 (1924) 2–5.

excavated in this region.”³⁵ His dream was to identify the site of ancient Mari, and he nearly lost his life looking for it when the car he was riding in ran off a cliff.³⁶

Meantime, in the Babylonian Collection itself, various other projects were in the offing. The Yale Syllabary was supposed to collect all possible readings and meanings of all cuneiform signs of all periods. Miss Grice and her successor, Ferris Stephens, devoted countless hours to this undertaking, excerpting texts, making and sorting cards. There was to be an Akkadian dictionary, an encyclopedia of Assyriology, and a library of ancient Near Eastern literature in translation. None of these came to pass.³⁷

Although Clay hoped his museum would be far from the noise of undergraduate residence halls (on a site now occupied by a parking garage), it seems unlikely that many undergraduates strayed in as it was. As early as 1913, a Mr. A. E. St. Clair kept the room open on Sunday afternoons from 2:30 to 5:00 PM, for the emolument of \$1.00.³⁸

A slight measure of the Babylonian profile at Yale of the time is provided by contrasting allusions made by two distinguished Yale men of letters. The future American novelist Sinclair Lewis graduated from Yale in 1908, just before Clay arrived on the scene. In one of his lesser-known novels, *Ann Vickers* (1933), Lewis mentions Babylonia in a quite uninformed way, with reference to the outlandish college room décor of his sturdy heroine's Lesbian roommate. Was he thinking of the lush interiors shown in D. W. Griffith's 1916 blockbuster film, *Intolerance*? In another, *Work of Art* (1934), he comments acidly that his rather stupid and idle heroine “had no particular longing to study Imagism or Assyriology or the History of Endocrinology.” The voraciously curious Lewis had graduated just too early to learn anything of importance about Mesopotamia.³⁹

35. Clay to Stokes, 1923.

36. “Dr. Clay's Story of His Oriental Journey,” *BASOR* 13 (1923) 5–10: “above and below Abu Kemal ... we spent some time looking for the ancient city of Mari or Maer ...” (p. 7); Correspondence files, Yale Babylonian Collection; A. Goetze, “Professor Clay and the Amurrite Problem,” *Yale University Library Gazette* 36 no. 3 (1962) 133–37. For the Yale expedition, Foster, “Formal Study,” 34–35.

37. Foster, “Beginnings of Assyriology,” 66–67.

38. Clay to Stokes, December 11, 1913.

39. Sinclair Lewis, *Ann Vickers*, chapter 5: “But we're not going to have any Babylonian – Carthaginian, is it? decorations in our bedroom!” Lewis may have seen the Yale reliefs, as in the same work he writes, “... his beard like a cropped Assyrian's” (chapter 38); *Work of Art*, chapter 21. The ruminating Assyriologist in *Dodsworth*, chapter 6 was probably a later shipboard encounter.

The future novelist and playwright Thornton Wilder (BA 1920) offers more of interest to this inquiry. Like everyone else, he had heard of Babylonia, and to him Babylon stood for a dead city, a perduring cliché.⁴⁰ But, in Wilder's 1937 play *Our Town*, the stage manager opines (Act 1): "Y'know – Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about 'em is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts ... and contracts for the sale of slaves. Yet every night all those families sat down for supper, and the father came home from work, and the smoke went up the chimney, - same as here."⁴¹

Wilder won a Pulitzer Prize for this play, though not on the basis of its Assyriological content. Striking in this passage is Wilder's reference to wheat contracts and slave sales, by no means the usual points brought up by the uninitiated when they declaim that Babylon is fallen. Could this mean that the brilliant but rather aimless Thornton Wilder had spent some time looking at the Babylonian Collection exhibits in the Osborn laboratory? Or, did he perhaps attend the Trowbridge Lectures as a freshman, when Clay was the chosen speaker? One more piece of evidence about the education of Wilder: after graduation, he could think of nothing much to do, so his father sent him to the American Academy in Rome to study archaeology. On this sandy foundation we may rest a claim that the Yale Babylonian Collection had provoked in Wilder some interest in things dead and gone.⁴²

Clay's unexpected death from cancer, September 14, 1925, carried off the driving spirit of all these projects. A sonnet by his friend George Alexander Kohut stands as an elegy to an Assyriologist, unique in English literature.⁴³

40. Benjamin R. Foster, "Assyriology and English Literature," in *From the Banks of the Euphrates, Studies in Honor of Alice Louise Slotsky*, ed. M. Ross (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 52–62. So, for example, Lewis's contemporary, William Saroyan, began his 1934 story, "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" with, "The end of all, of Rome and yes of Babylon ..."

41. *Our Town, A Play in Three Acts* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 32, set in a small, depression-era New Hampshire town.

42. For Wilder's memories of his undergraduate years, see *Yale Alumni Magazine* Jan/Feb 2012: 357. The precocious numismatist Edward T. Newell (BA 1907, MA 1909) was an exceptional case deserving of greater mention elsewhere. He gave his collection of tablets and seals to Yale in 1938 (NCBT).

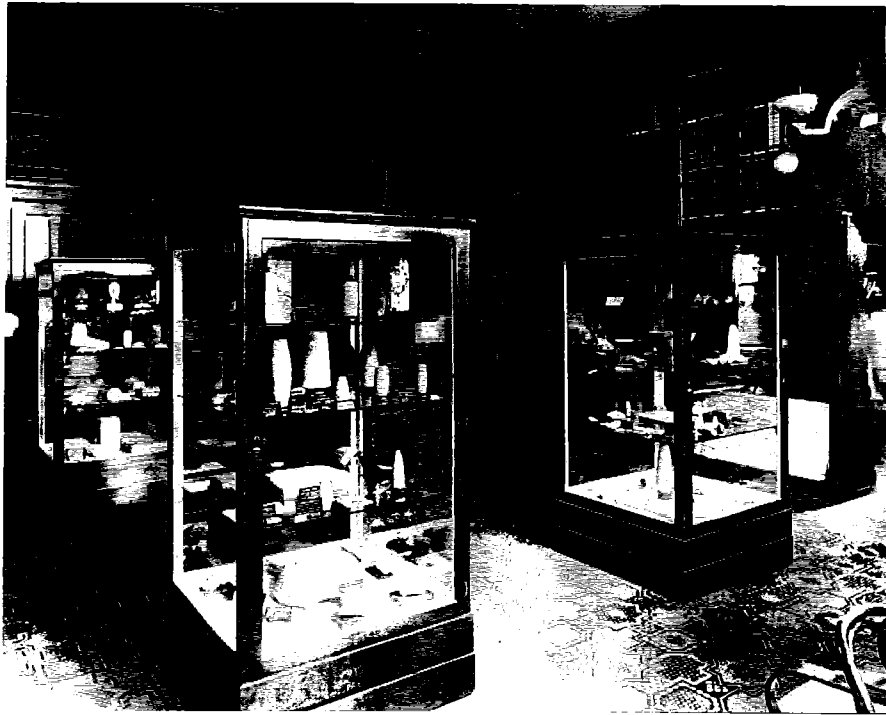
43. *Yale University Library Gazette* 5 (1930–31) 34.

*To Albert Tobias Clay.
Scholar, Humanist, Friend
(1866–1925)*

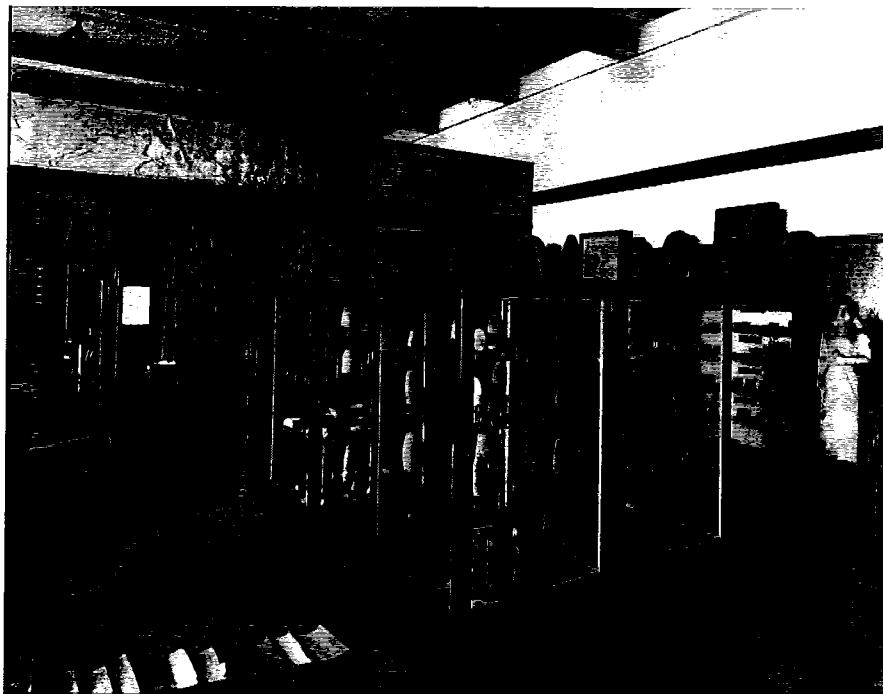
Thou hast attained thy lifelong wish at last: —
Now are thou free to wander and explore
The Streams of Paradise; to quarry ore
From OPHIR; reconstruct the storied past
Out of the undeciphered tablets, torn
From clay-beds whence the Amorites were born;
Now canst thou shed new light upon the Book
And bring fresh proof to reinforce thy claim
Anent the Hebrew Scriptures; learn whence came
And whither went the Hittites; where to look
For long-lost races. Conquerors and Kings
Shall shed their sacred cerements to bring
Out of their tombs their tribute-offering
And speak again through thee of wondrous things.



Albert T. Clay



Babylonian Collection, Edwards Hall, 1912-1918.



Babylonian Collection, Osborn Zoological Laboratory, 1918-1930.