DIPLOMACY AND BUREAUCRACY: HOW AN AMERICAN ARCHEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION FOUND ITS WAY TO NIPPUR

The Babylon Exploration Fund partnered with the University of Pennsylvania to dispatch four seasons of expeditions to the sacred city of Nippur (1888-1900). Through trial and error, members of the expedition eventually learned how to navigate the Ottoman Empire’s bureaucracy to obtain excavation permits.

Because of John P. Peters’ initial bunglings in obtaining the first permit, Hermann Hilprecht took it upon himself to develop a stronger working relationship with Osman Hamdi Bey to better facilitate the next three expeditions. Hermann Hilprecht later claimed that Sultan Abdulhamid II gifted the team’s finds to him and that he in turn gifted them to the University of Pennsylvania.

Obtaining Permissions

Both the Babylon Exploration Fund and the University of Pennsylvania applied to the Ottoman government for excavation permits and special permission to export their finds.

Letters of support from President Cleveland and several university presidents helped facilitate the State Department’s support in helping John P. Peters eventually navigate discussions with the Grand Vizier, Kiamil Pasha, and Osman Hamdi Bey, the Director of the Imperial Museum, to receive the expeditions’ first firman to excavate at Nippur and “export antiquities.”

Consul to Baghdad

John Henry Haynes was appointed the first U.S. consul to Baghdad in August of 1888. The position had been created in part to facilitate the efforts of the excavation at Nippur. Prominent Philadelphians, including the collector of the port and the founder of the Philadelphian Times, had lobbied Congress. Despite provost Pepper’s requests on his behalf, consul Haynes was given no salary. He frequently requested leave from his post to either escape cholera breakouts or to conduct excavations at Nippur.

Travel Documents

[Image of travel documents]