

remarkable fruitfulness of the soil which provided the basis for the development of the astounding civilizations which grew up and succeeded one another upon the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

The land of Mesopotamia was naturally of varying quality. If allowed to lie uncultivated it soon turned into wastelands, and became covered with thorns and thistles, or with a white crust of potassium nitrate ( $\text{KNO}_3$ ). Great sections of Southern Babylonia were made up of marsh land, unsuitable for regular grain growth, and fit only for pasture lands. The alluvial plain was surrounded by the desert, where the lack of water made agriculture impossible. In Assyria in the north, additional difficulties were provided by the mountains. In contrast with these sections of poor land, were the many excellent areas along the river where the land was flat, free from rocks, and easily accessible for irrigation. On these sections tremendous crops were produced. In order to increase the area that could be cultivated and also to regulate the excess flow of water in spring, many canals were constructed. The land was covered with a network of these and one of the greatest claims of any king to have rendered real service to his people would consist in his having increased the amount of land which could be watered and made available for agriculture.

The principal crops of Babylonia were the various types of grain. Of these barley (Asnan) was the most common and next to this was wheat (kibtu), which Barossus tells us grew wild in the land. Millet and sesame were also produced, and according to Herodots, they grew as high as trees. Grain was the foundation of the food supply. In addition