

we will therefore not take the time to look at the excavations in detail, but will spend most of our time on the written material.

### C. History of Decipherment and Study of the Language.

#### 1. Decipherment.

The key to the reading of cuneiform came, not from Mesopotamia, but from Persia. In 1765 Carsten Niebuhr, a Danish traveler, visited Persepolis, the ancient capital of Persia, and copied a number of inscriptions that were chiselled on the stone walls of the great palaces of the ancient Persian kings. His copies were studied by various European scholars. A young German named G. F. Grotefend was able to put them together and to make a substantial start on the decipherment of cuneiform writing. Afterwards a similar start was made independently by an Englishman, Henry C. Rawlinson, who, as a young army officer, was sent to Persia in 1833 to assist in the reorganization of the Persian army. There he saw the great Persian inscriptions high up on the mountains near Hamadan, and began to study them. Most important was the Behistun inscription of Darius I. About five hundred feet above the plain many lines of large cuneiform signs had been chiseled on to the face of the rock, next to a picture of the victorious Darius, with many conquered rebels tied together at his feet. The inscription contained three sets of lines, and Rawlinson assumed that these must represent three languages. One set had about thirty different signs which occurred and recurred. The second set of lines, which was somewhat shorter, had about a hundred different characters, while the third, which was still shorter, had far more. It was a good guess that the simpler writing was an alphabetic system and that it represented the ancient Persian language. Since a later form of Persian, in a different kind of writing, was already known, it was possible to make a start at interpreting the first set of lines. In 1846