

## Abraham in the Cuneiform Inscriptions.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR SAYCE, D.D., LL.D.

WHILE Old Testament criticism, so-called, has been busy repeating the task of the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, first devising a complicated theory and then forcing the facts into accommodation to it, the excavator and archæologist have been steadily and soberly at work ascertaining what the facts actually are, and restoring to us once more the lost history of the ancient East. In Babylonia the work of discovery has of late been particularly active. Thousands of inscribed clay tablets have been brought to light which acquaint us with the daily life and thoughts, not only of the contemporaries of Abraham, but also of the centuries that preceded his birth. It is hardly too much to say that we now know as much about the social habits and beliefs of the Babylonians in the age of Abraham as we do about those of the Greeks in the age of Pericles.

I propose in the following article to give some account of what the latest results of discovery and research have told us about the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, and in what manner it is now possible to write his history from a Babylonian point of view. In Babylonia he bore the name of Abram, and he was born in "Ur of the Chaldees." In the cuneiform documents of the age to which he belonged the name appears as *Aba-ramu*. It was not a Babylonian name, but was one of those borne by the Western Semites, or "Amorites," as the Babylonians called them, who were settled in Babylonia. Ur, the patriarch's birthplace, the modern Mukaiyyar, was built on the western bank of the Euphrates, not far from Eridu, the ancient seaport of the country. Its name signified "The City," and was given to it by the Semitic population, for whom it was the leading city of the world. It was a great centre of Western Semitic trade. On the one hand, the maritime trade of Eridu was poured into it, "the ships of Ur" having much the same

meaning as "the ships of Tarshish" in the Old Testament; on the other hand, it stood on the edge of the Arabian desert, and was therefore in close touch with the "Amorite" peoples of the West. It was, in fact, a meeting-place of the civilized Babylonian and the less cultured Arab, the spot at which merchants and officials, agriculturists and nomad herdsmen would have gathered together. Its foreign population must have been considerable. Just as in Egypt to-day the wealthier Beduin settle down and become more or less peaceable townsmen and villagers, so in Ur the wealthier Beduin of the desert would have had a tendency to do the same. Here, too, would have come merchants and traders from various parts of the Semitic world. Among them were numbers of "commercial travellers" (*damqari*), who travelled on behalf of their Babylonian employers from one end of Western Asia to the other, and about whom we hear a good deal in the cuneiform texts.

Two or three centuries before Abraham a dynasty of Kings ruled over Babylonia for 117 years who made Ur their capital. Wherever their traders had gone, the soldiers of Ur followed. We hear of campaigns in the Lebanon, and the last King of the dynasty fell while endeavouring to suppress a revolt in Elam. Babylonia was already an Imperial power, and claimed to be mistress of Western Asia. Its rulers regarded the Tigris and Euphrates as belonging to them; from their sources to the sea the two great rivers seemed to be of right the possession of the Babylonian Kings. Along their banks the agents of the Babylonian commercial firms made their way; silver and copper were brought from the mines of Cappadocia, the cedars of Amanus were floated down the Euphrates, and the pine-logs of Armenia down the Tigris, while the alluvial plain of Babylonia received its stone from the quarries of the Lebanon.

Between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean lived the Semitic tribes, whom the Babylonians called Amorites. They were not Beduin, who were known as the Sutu, and they were divided into a number of small principalities who acknowledged the supremacy of "the King of the Amorites." The King of

the Amorites paid tribute to Babylonia whenever the Babylonian Government was strong enough to enforce it, but there were also times when the Amorites successfully raided Babylonia and carried away its spoil. One of the Amorite principalities was Khana on the Euphrates, not far from the mouth of the Khabur.

In the age of the Dynasty of Ur, the Amorites were content to live on terms of peace and submission to their more powerful neighbours. "Governors" of the land of the Amorites were appointed by the Babylonian Government, and the fragment of a cadastral survey made by one of them for the purpose of taxation is now in the Louvre. Large numbers of Amorites settled in Babylonia for the sake of trade, and apparently were allowed equal rights and privileges there with the native inhabitants. Ur was naturally one of their chief places of resort. It was the capital of the Empire, it was built on the western side of the Euphrates, and it was a great centre of trade.

The Amorite language differed from that of the Semitic Babylonians as one Italian dialect differs from another. The Semitic language spoken in Babylonia had been profoundly modified by contact with the agglutinative Sumerian; the language of the Amorites, on the other hand, was comparatively pure. The Aramaic dialects had not as yet assumed a separate existence, and little difference could be detected between the Amorite language that was spoken in Canaan and that which was used in South-Eastern Arabia. The Amorite tribes of Canaan and South-Eastern Arabia alike looked to Samu or Shem as their common forefather or ancestral god; they revered the same deities and called their children by the same names.

With the death in battle of the last King of the Dynasty of Ur troublous times set in for Babylonia. How long they lasted is uncertain. When the curtain is again lifted, Northern Babylonia has been successfully invaded and occupied by an Amorite Prince. Sumu-abi, "Shem is my father," was his

name. But he had many rivals to contend against, and it was only gradually that they were slain or enslaved; and Southern Babylonia remained outside his authority. Eventually it was overrun by the Elamites, who established a dynasty of their own at Larsa. Meanwhile the Amorite King in the North had obtained possession of Babylon, which he proceeded to fortify and make the seat of his Government. For the first time Babylon became a capital.

The fifth King of the Amorite Dynasty, founded by Sumu-abi, was Sin-muballid. The Elamites were now more menacing than ever, and Sin-muballid struggled against them in vain. At his death his son, a mere boy, was placed on the throne of Babylon as a vassal-subject of the Elamite King.

The boy-King, however, was destined eventually to drive the Elamite back to his own land, to re-establish the Babylonian Empire in Western Asia, and to become one of the most famous of Babylonian Kings. To the Babylonians he was known as Khammu-rabi, to the Assyrians as Ammu-rapi, to readers of the Old Testament as Amraphel. While still a vassal of the Elamites he followed his sovereign-lord, Chedorlaomer, when he marched into Palestine to suppress a revolt of the Canaanite Princes on the shores of the Dead Sea. The district in which they lived was especially valuable in Babylonian eyes. It was a land of naphtha, and naphtha was as commercially important in the Babylonia of the Abrahamic age as petroleum is among us of to-day. It was used not only as mortar, but above all for heating and lighting purposes. The Babylonian lamp, of which the Greek lamp was the descendant, differed in shape from the lamps employed elsewhere in the Oriental world, and the shape was due to the fact that the lighting material was petroleum. Hence the naphtha district of Southern Palestine was a portion of the Empire which the Babylonian and his Elamite suzerain could ill afford to lose. The trade-route which led from it was protected by the hill-fortress of Uru-salim, the Jerusalem of the Israelites, the name of which, as written in the cuneiform texts, indicates that it had been founded by the Babylonians. The

name, in fact, is Babylonian, and means "the City of Salim," the first element in it being the same word as the name of Ur.

The campaign brought Khammu-rabi, the Amorite King of Babylon, into contact with another Amorite, Abram the Hebrew. Abram had come, indeed, not from Babylon, but from Southern Babylonia, where the Elamite Prince Eri-Aku, or Arioch, reigned in his capital of Larsa.<sup>1</sup> His migration to Canaan was no unusual event. He simply traversed the roads repeatedly trodden by the traders, the soldiers, and the officials of the day. Wherever he went there was the same official language, the same government, the same laws, and the same form of religion. As an Amorite, the Amorite language would have been that of his own home; as a native of Babylonia, the language spoken there would also have been familiar to him. The agents of the great firms were constantly passing to and from the West, and we hear of cases in which business obliged the heads of the firms themselves to be absent from home for several years. Between Ur and Harran, the first resting-place of the patriarch, the relations were particularly close, and in both cities the moon-god was the presiding deity. In the near neighbourhood of Harran was the town of Serug, and Serug, it will be remembered, was one of the ancestors of Abram.

In Babylonia Abram was known as an Amorite. Among his own people he had another designation. He was a member of the Amorite tribe of Hebrews who traced their descent from a certain Eber. The Babylonian form of Eber would be Ibirum, and this very name is met with in the cuneiform documents as that of an Amorite. On a stela dedicated to the goddess Asherah, which has been found near Diarbekir, Khammu-rabi is entitled, not King of Babylonia, but simply "King of the land of the Amorites," and this stela was erected by a governor of the province whose name was Ibirum.

That Eber, the Hebrew, should thus prove to be a personal

<sup>1</sup> The Ellasar of Gen. xiv. 1 represents the cuneiform Al Larsa, "the city of Larsa."

name may, perhaps, appear surprising to scholars who have been trained in Greek and Latin learning, and who naturally transfer the ideas acquired from classical mythology to the Semitic world. But the Semitic world differed from the Greek and Latin world just as it differs from the European world of to-day. The Semitic tribe goes back to an individual, and the name it bears is consequently a personal name. Cities and countries are personified, but not tribes or families. The eponymous hero was unknown to the Semite; in his place stood the individual ancestor from whom the tribe or family obtained its name.

The cuneiform documents have shown that what holds true of Eber holds true also of Israel. Israel also was the name of an individual, and it was borne by Western Semites in the Abrahamic age. One of the cuneiform tablets of that period from the Amorite State of Khana is dated in the reign of Isarlim, the Babylonian form of Israel, while another refers to a canal which started from the city of Zakku-Isarlim. Israel, therefore, is no ethnic title coined from the name of the Israelites. It was a personal name already borne by those Western Semites to whom Abraham belonged long before the time when the sons of the Biblical Israel descended into Egypt.

The name of Jacob, shortened from Jacob-el, is equally a personal name, and was still more common among the Amorites of the Abrahamic age. We meet with it, both in its full and in its abbreviated forms, among the Amorites mentioned in the legal and commercial tablets of that period. It was also the name of a Hyksos King of Egypt, and the Hyksos, or at all events their leaders, as we now know, were Canaanites in origin.

A large proportion of Amorite proper names, it may be observed, are compounded with *el*, "god." It took the place of the name of the specific deity to whom the child was dedicated at birth, and generally appears instead of it at the end of a compound. Each tribe, perhaps each family, had its own special god. The Hebrew tribe could not have been an exception; it, too, must have had its own peculiar deity. The

Old Testament tells us what it was, and the statement of the Old Testament is confirmed by the cuneiform texts. Already in the days before the Deluge we hear that "men began to call upon the name of Yahveh."

Several years ago I drew attention to the name of an Amorite mentioned in the cuneiform texts of the Khammu-rabi period which is written Yaum-ilu. This would correspond with the Jehiel of the Old Testament, the later Joel. Since then other Assyriologists have pointed out other Amorite names which also seem to be compounded with that of Yahu or Yahveh. Some of these, however, are of doubtful etymology. But we now know that in certain of them the name of the national God of Israel really appears. In legal documents of the Kassite period, which followed the fall of the Khammu-rabi Dynasty, Professor Clay has found names like Yau-bani, "Yahu is my creator"; Yaua, the Biblical Jehu; and the abbreviated Yâû, as well as the feminine Yautum.

How old the name of Yahu, generally written Yau, was among the dwellers in Babylonia, and how familiar they must have been with it, is shown by the lexical tablets in which Yahu is stated to be the equivalent of *ilu*, "god," and an attempt is made to explain it through a native Babylonian etymology. Before it could have been regarded as the equivalent of *ilu*, it must have been known for so long a period as to have become a general term for the deity. That it should have continued in use in Babylonia after the migration of Abraham and his family is only natural. The family of Abraham was but one among the many of Amorite ancestry which resided there; even the ruling dynasty, like the Hebrew patriarch, traced its descent from Shem. We have no reason for thinking that none of the Hebrew tribe itself was left behind in Ur. Nor have we any reason for believing that Yahu was worshipped only by the Hebrew tribe; other tribes as well may have participated in the cult.

From Babylonia the family to whom Abraham belonged would have brought the cult to the West along with the

civilization and traditions of the Babylonians. Terah, the father of Abraham, may have been compelled to leave Ur in the fourth year of Sin-muballid when a massacre of its citizens took place. The Amorite merchants are not likely to have been desirous of remaining in a place where massacres like that of our own time at Adana were being perpetrated; or the requirements of trade may have led him to take up his residence in a city which commanded the high road of commerce between East and West, and was, I believe, the capital of the Amorite Kings. From hence the journey to Canaan was easy and natural.

Already in the age of the Dynasty of Ur, as I have stated, there had been Babylonian governors of Syria and Palestine, one of whom is shown by his name, Urimelech, to have been a native of the country. In Canaan the governor represented the King, and as the Babylonian King was deified like the Roman Emperors, he received a title which originally denoted the viceroy or high-priest of a god. Now, it is remarkable that in the twenty-third chapter of Genesis, in which the purchase of the cave of Machpelah is described, Abram is addressed by the Hittites of Hebron by a title which is a literal translation of the Babylonian title, "Viceroy of the deified King." In Babylonia itself the King was called *ilu*, "god," in the singular, but we learn from the Tel-el-Amarna tablets that this was replaced in Canaan by the plural *ilâni* "gods," and in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, accordingly, the plural *elohim* is used instead of the singular *el*. Thus in the old law recorded in Exod. xxii. 28, we read: "Thou shalt not revile the *elohim* (or Babylonian King), nor curse his viceroy among thy people." Hence it is that in the account of the purchase of the cave of Machpelah the Babylonian *issak ili*, "viceroy of the deified King" appears under the form of "viceroy of *elohim*," with the plural "gods" substituted for the singular "god." Does the title thus given to the Hebrew patriarch mean that he, too, like Urimelech, exercised the functions of a Babylonian governor in the south of Canaan? This, at any rate, would explain the references to the troops which served under him and acted as



his bodyguard—the word used to describe them being a Babylonian term which on one of the Taanach tablets is applied to the “bodyguard” of the local sheikh,—to his alliance with the Amorite Princes, to his successful night attack on the Elamite army, and to his respectful treatment by the King of Jerusalem. His position would have been similar to that of the Egyptian governors and native Princes of Canaan about whom we hear so much in the Tel-el-Amarna tablets.

However this may be, the history of the patriarchal age and of the Hebrew patriarchs has now happily passed out of the region of subjective criticism into the domain of archæological fact. Even in Great Britain and America, the last refuge of obsolete German theories, there is beginning to be some glimmering of knowledge as to the results of scientific research in the field of Oriental archæology. For the archæologist and Assyriologist the question has long since been settled. In 1869 an eminent German philologist could prove to the satisfaction of himself and his disciples that “the fourteenth chapter of Genesis,” to use Professor Hommel’s words, was “the biassed invention of a later date”; to-day we have found the names of the Princes and cities mentioned in it on the Babylonian monuments, and have learned that the political situation described in it is historically true. To quote Professor Hommel once more, the verification of the story of Chedor-laomer’s campaign “will for ever remain a stumbling-block in the path of those who refuse to recognize a single line of the Pentateuch as genuine, and, try how they may to remove it, it will continue to defy their persistent efforts.” For the archæologist, at any rate, the fantastic theories of subjective criticism are as dead as the Ptolemaic theory of the universe.

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SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE.—My attention has been called to the following words of Professor Driver in his “Additions and Corrections in the Seventh Edition of the Book of Genesis”: “It is stated by Professor Sayce expressly, and by Dr. Orr and Professor A. T. Clay by implication, that Nöldeke’s arguments against the historical character of the narrative of Gen. xiv.

have been refuted by archæology. . . . It will probably surprise the reader to be told that, of the series of arguments thus attributed to Professor Nöldeke, while the one about the names is attributed to him with *partial* correctness (though, in so far as it is stated correctly, it has not been refuted by archæology), the other arguments were *never used by him at all!* Professor Nöldeke, in the articles referred to, does not say a single word about the political situation presupposed in Gen. xiv. being incredible and impossible, or about the impossibility of Babylonian armies at such a distant date marching to Canaan, or of Canaan being subject to Babylonia. . . . So far from denying the wide dominion of the Eastern power, Professor Nöldeke thus expressly declares that there are no reasons for questioning it! . . . The one grain of truth in Professor Sayce's long indictment is that of the names of the five *Canaanite Kings* [two at least] are formed artificially." A reference in support of this is given to Nöldeke's article in *Untersuchungen zur Kritik des A. T.'s*.

In my book ("Monument Facts," p. 54) I have given *two* references, not only one to the *Untersuchungen*, but also another to Nöldeke's article (written the next year) in the *Zeitschrift* (misprinted *Jahrbücher*) *für wissenschaftliche Theologie* (1870) pp. 213 *et seq.* All mention of this latter reference is suppressed by Professor Driver, doubtless discreetly from the point of view of the negative critic, as will be seen from the following quotations, which I give, in order to avoid any semblance of partiality, in the translations of Dr. Orr :

*Z. f. w. Theol.*, pp. 213 *et seq.*

"(1) I sum up once more the general points. Of the names in Gen. xiv. several are unhistorical. . . . (2) The expedition of the Kings cannot have taken place as narrated. . . . We have here to do with a romantic expedition, the direction of which is determined by the aim of sharper effect, and has in itself no historical probability. (3) The small number of the host whose complete victory over the four Kings is the climax of the story is contrary to sense, while nevertheless that number designates the maximum which a private person could possess of fighting men. Who now in all this will hold fast to a historical kernel may do so; he must then admit that at some perfectly uncertain time in great antiquity a King of Elam ruled over the land of the Jordan and made a military expedition to it. That would be the utmost concession I could make. . . . To myself it appears much more probable, in view of the consistent, and, for the aim of the narrator, exceedingly well-arranged, but still in reality impossible, course of the narrative that we

have here a deliberate fiction into which only one or two historical names have been introduced.”

This article was written in answer to the Assyriologist Schrader, but the article in the *Untersuchungen*, to which Professor Driver does refer, gives very little more support to the Oxford Professor's allegations. Here are some quotations from it :

“The unhistoricity of the narrative in Gen. xiv. . . . The ‘High Father’ of so many settled and nomadic peoples cannot easily be a historical person. . . . The dating is superfluous, and tells us nothing. . . . [Bera and Birsha are] quite decidedly unhistorical . . . [they are Kings of] the two mythical chief cities of the ‘Circle.’ . . . The alliterative pairing of the names of the other two Kings speaks more for their fictitious than for their historical origin. . . . The artificial chronology of Genesis is for us no rule. . . . The utmost we can admit is that the narrator has employed a few real names intermingled with false or invented ones, and that the appearance of historicity thus produced can as little permanently deceive us as the proper names in the Book of Esther. . . . This whole expedition is historically improbable, as it is adopted for the production of a striking effect : a sure sign that it is fictitious. . . . Does there not lie precisely in the minute details which give the appearance of historicity to the narrative a manifest improbability? . . . (As to Abram's pursuit) if that is possible, then nothing is impossible. . . . It is very improbable that the story rests on a real tradition. . . . The appearance of precision which the names and date impart vanishes entirely on closer examination.”

Comment is needless.

Professor Driver further assures his readers that Nöldeke “expressly rejects the explanation of Amraphel from Sanskrit,” leading them to infer that I have ascribed to him the explanation in question. So far from doing so, I have stated as plainly as English allows me to do that the attempts to derive the names Amraphel and his allies from Sanskrit had been made by other scholars, not by Nöldeke, and have even given a reference on the subject to Renan. It is not the first time, however, that I have found the “higher critics” unable to interpret correctly the meaning of an ordinary English sentence : it is, perhaps, not so strange, therefore, that the Old Testament writers should fare badly at their hands. The method of interpretation resembles the logic which fails to discover how the fact that the agreement of the pre-Mosaic Babylonian version of the story of the Deluge

with both the so-called Elohist and Yahvistic narratives in Genesis can "impugn the critical conclusion that the Biblical narrative is composite." It is obvious that, if the latter is composite, the two authors must first have made a compact that the one should omit what the other inserted.



## Spain and the Vatican.

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IT is almost impossible for the ordinary Englishman to understand the close relation that existed in Spain between Roman Catholicism and national policy. The task becomes harder viewed in the light of history, for in no country is there a greater readiness to absorb Roman dogma and a greater unwillingness, when the life of the nation is vigorous, to accept ultramontane dictation. Before the Spanish Church in the eleventh century became subject to Rome its policy towards non-Catholics was tolerant, for it held it to be lawful to attack Mahomedans with spiritual, not with temporal, arms. As Christians they might, at the peril of their lives, introduce the Gospel among those who followed the teaching of the Koran. This should be done with the tongue, which is the sword of Jesus Christ. Even in the thirteenth century the tradition of tolerance had not died out, and a verse of "Roncesvalles" says :

" Porta patet omnibus, infirmis et sanis  
Non solum catholicis, verum et paganis,  
Judæis, hereticis, ociosis, vanis ;  
Et, ut dicam breviter, bonis et profanis."

When Rome became mistress of Spain, and the might of the Inquisition was established, Spain became proverbial for her ruthless persecution, and "The holiest Land of the Virgin" was the pitiless exterminator of all who differed from the orthodoxy of Rome. "Catholic unity" had to be preserved at all costs, and, as Ulick Burke concludes, "The Holy Office has done its work in Spain. A rapacious Government, an enslaved