

THE COLLECTION OF BABYLONIAN TABLETS
BELONGING TO JOSEPH OFFORD, ESQ.

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THERE are probably but few studies that have thrown so much light on the history of the Holy Land in ancient times as that known as the science of Assyriology. And not only has it added to our knowledge of the history—the language, political state, manners, customs, and also the religion of that part of the world before the advent of the Hebrews have likewise been illustrated. The greatest discovery ever made in the domain of Assyriology bearing upon this tract was, in all probability, the Tell-el-Amarna letters, found in Egypt. These made known to us the fact that the current non-vernacular in the Western Asian district, before the entry of the Hebrews, was that tongue revealed to us by the monuments as the native speech of the Babylonians and the Assyrians, nations closely related in ancient times and apparently deriving their civilisation from the same source.

This being the case, I have no reason to apologise for calling attention to a few tablets of the collection of Mr. J. Offord, who desired that the story which they had to tell should be printed in the *Quarterly Statement* of the Fund. They do not come from Palestine, nor do they, to all appearance, mention anything in connection with the ancient state of that all-engrossing land, but they recall to us many a sacred story in the names that they mention, and the new, yet old, Semitic words they reveal to us, whilst their Babylonian script reminds us of the time before the Israelites entered therein, and the interesting, though rare, Aramaic docketts bring before our minds the period when those conquering Israelites, who have made such a mark on the world's history, themselves departed to their captivity at Babylon, and learned to write another language in another style of writing, the one being the Aramaic tongue, generally known as Chaldee, and the other that which has developed into what we now call square Hebrew.

The tablets of Mr. Offord's collection of antiquities that I have seen are four in number. One of them has been published by the

Rev. J. N. Strassmaier, S.J., but the others are, as far as I know, unpublished. There are also three Babylonian cylinder-seals, which present some points of interest.

The first text that I translate is a simple list of amounts of a substance called *šarti*. Now the only word *šartu* (nominative form) in Delitzsch's "Handwörterbuch" means "hair" (that of the body, not of the head, which was *pirtu* or *muttatu*). In the list of amounts in question, however, one would hardly expect to find hair mentioned, but it might be wool, which is another meaning of the word. I suspect, though, that the substance represented

I.

Tablet belonging to J. OFFORD, Esq., apparently referring to barley.

by *šarti* is in reality "barley," the bearded or "hairy" cereal, the word for which is very rare. If this be the case, it would show that the Hebrew שַׁעֲרָה, "hair," and שַׁעֲרֵה, "barley," were represented by the same word in Assyro-Babylonian.

The length of the tablet is $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and the width or height $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. From the appearance of the clay it evidently came from Sippara (Abu-habbah). The following is a transcription and translation of the text:—

TRANSCRIPTION.

Obverse.

Išten-ešret ma-na šar-ti ša Ḳ A-a-ḫu-u (?);
 Êsrâ-sibet ma-na šar-ti ša Ḳ Šamaš-aḫa-iddina;
 Ḳamsâ ma-na šar-ti ša Ḳ Nabû-zêr-iddina abil Ḳ . . . u (?)-a (?)-a (?);
 Šelašâ-tišet bar ma-na šar-ti ša Ḳ A-ḫu-šu-nu;
 Êsrâ-šinâ bar ma-na šar-ti ša Ḳ I-di-īlu;
 Šelašâ-išten ma-na šar-ti ša Ḳ Na-ḡir.

Reverse.

Êsrâ-šalset bar ma-na Ḳ Nabû-zêr-iddina
 abil Ḳ Ur-du.

Arḫu Nisannu, ūmu šissôšru, šattu istenešrêtu.

TRANSLATION.

- 11 *mana, the barley of Aahû (?)*;
 27 *mana, the barley of Šamaš-aḫa-iddina*;
 50 *mana, the barley of Nabû-zêr-iddina, son of . . . uaa (?)*;
 39½ *mana, the barley of Aḫu-šunu*;
 22½ *mana, the barley of Idi-īlu*;
 31 *mana, the barley of Naḡir.*

23½ *mana Nabû-zêr-iddina*
son of Urdu.

Month Nisan, day 16th, year 11th.

If my translation of "barley" for the word *šarti*, which appears in this text, be right, then the ideogram (Akkadian or Sumerian expression) for this word is  (see the "Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum," pars ii, t. i, fasc. 1, p. 43). The transcription there given (which is my own) is *serani*, and is based on the ¹ of the Aramaic version of the tablet there published. The equivalent Syriac word is  *se'arta*, agreeing in form with the Assyro-Babylonian *šartu*, and the Hebrew .²

The reverse of the tablet has an additional entry in smaller characters, this having been omitted by mistake on the obverse.

¹ This agrees in form with the Hebrew , the plural.

² It is to be noted that, if the *šarti* of this tablet meant "hair" or "wool," it could hardly be used without being defined more exactly, and would need the name of the animal from which it was taken.

As the person here mentioned had the same name as the third of the list, the names of the fathers of the two Nabû-zēr-iddinas have been added, so as to distinguish them.¹ This name, it may be noted, is the Nebuzaradan of 2 Kings xxv, 8, &c., and is there vocalised, with regard to its last component parts, like Merodach-baladan.

Judging from the date, the tablet must have been written either in the reign of Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar, Nabonidus, or Darius. Of these four reigns those of the first two may be considered as the most probable.

II.

Tablet belonging to J. OFFORD, Esq., referring to garments for the images of deities at Sippara.

The second tablet is $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 1 inch high, and has almost the whole of the reverse blank. This also evidently came from Sippara, as the inscription refers to robes for the deities of the great temple there.

TRANSCRIPTION.

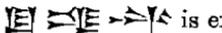
Išten ma-na šanēšret šiqli SIG-KAN-ME-DA (SIG) ta-kil-ti
 maštaktu šit-ta kusēti
 šit-ta naḥlapāti
 ša D.P. mārāti Ê-babar-ra
 ni[bitlu] ša D.P. Bu-ne-ne
 † Du-muq D.P. UŠ-BAR
 it-ta-din
 Araḥ Aari ūmu tišū šattu ḥamiš-ēšrētu.

¹ The name of the father of the Nabû-zer-iddina mentioned in the third line of the text must have been added at the same time as the additional name on the reverse.

TRANSLATION.

1 mana 12 shekels of violet woollen stuff
 the weight for two robes (and)
 two mantles
 for the divine daughters of E-babarra, (and)
 the garment for the god Bunene,
 Dumuq, the weaver,
 has given.
 Month Iyyar, day 9th, year 15th.

This text testifies to the renown of the city of Sippar or Sippara as a centre of ancient Babylonian weaving industry. In all probability it would not be going too far to suggest that the "goodly garment of Shinar," mentioned in Joshua vii, 21, came from the neighbourhood of this city. The word *takiltu*, "violet," is the Hebrew תַּכִּילְתָּ, mostly translated *iakivthos*, *iakivthos* by the Septuagint. This colour was obtained from a species of murex. (See the article "Purpur," in Riehm's "Biblischer Handwörterbuch.")

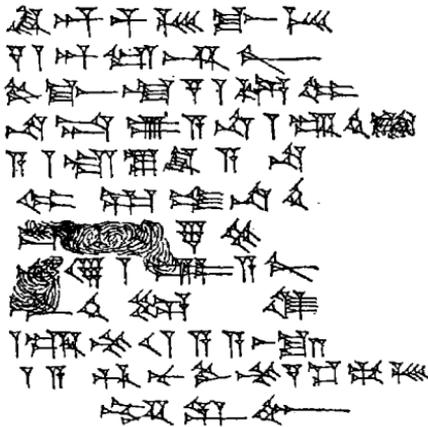
The first word in line 5 is to be restored . It occurs in the list of clothing and stuffs published in W.A.I. V, pl. 15, l. 52e, and is there explained by a word of which only the first character, , *ni*, remains. I have restored *nibittu*, by comparison with line 53 of the obv. of the same list, where the Akkadian  is explained.

Sippar was also the chief centre of the worship of Šamaš, the Sun-god, and of the deities associated with him—Aa, the Moon-goddess as his consort; Bunene, a god of whom very little is known; "the lady of Sippar," probably consort of Bunene; Anunitum, one of the names of the goddess Ištar; Gula, the "great" goddess, the same as Bau, she who was described as "glorious." Besides these, Rimmon or Hadad was worshipped there, with his consort Šala; Anu, the god of the heavens, with his consort Anatu; and Mišarum and Dâanu, the two attendants of the Sun-god, the principal deity of the place. There, too, divine honours were paid to the chariot of the Sun-god, and even the temple-tower, a type of the tower of Babel, such as all the principal cities of Babylonia possessed, was honoured in the same way.

Among the minor deities of the place, however, were the

divine Daughters of E-babara, who are mentioned in the translation of the tablet of which we are now speaking. May we, by chance, see in this expression the key to the enigmatical Succoth Benoth, which the Babylonians who were transported to Samaria are said to have made? That they should have made booths for the divine daughters whom they worshipped is not only conceivable, but probable. The inhabitants of Babylon referred to in 2 Kings xvii, 30, no doubt had their own "divine daughters" whom they worshipped, as did their fellow-countrymen, the dwellers in Sippara.

III.



Tablet belonging to J. OFFORD, Esq., referring to the sale of an enclosure.
(Dated in the 18th year of Nabopolassar.)

The third tablet is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches long by 1 inch high, and is inscribed on both sides as well as on the upper and lower edges. Judging from the writing this also comes from Sippara.

TRANSCRIPTION.

Uṣurat parzillē rabūti
 ša ḫ D.P. Nergal-bēl-uṣur
 D.P. gal-la ša ḫ Šul-lum
 na-du-u a-na ḫ Bēl-uḫall-iṭ
 abil ḫ Ala-lu-mur a-na
 mi-sir-tum na-din
 araḫ Ululi (?) ūmu sibū
 šattu samna-ēšrētu ḫ Nabū-abla-uṣur
 šar Bābili D.S.
 ḫ Bēl-iddina u ḫ Ab-la-a ina qātā
 ḫ A-ḫu-nu D.P. mu-šu-rim ālpē
 maḫ-ru'

TRANSLATION.

*A railing of stout irons
which Nergal-bél-ušur
servant of Šullum
fixed, to Bél-uballit
son of Ala-lámur for
an enclosure has been sold.
Month Elul (?), day 7th,
year 18th, Nabopolassar,
king of Babylon.
Bél-iddina and Ablaa from the hands
of Ahunu the neat-herd
have received (it).*

In this text we have a document of a somewhat uncommon nature, for it is seldom that we meet with a reference to erections of this kind. Indeed, were it not for the expression *parzillē rabūti*, I should be in great doubt as to what the text referred to, the first character being one having a large number of meanings. The word *mīsirtum* in line 6, however, which comes from the root *ésēru*, "to enclose," and is connected with the Hebrew רִסְסָה, seems to place the meaning beyond a doubt. The masculine noun, *mésiru*, is quoted by Delitzsch as meaning "enclosure" in a military sense, and "covering" (overlying) of a door. *Mésirru* seems to be another way of writing the same word.

The Semitic reading of the first character, with the prefix for "wood," 𒍪 𒍪, is *ušurtu* (construct case, *ušurat*), meaning "barrier." As, however, the object in question is described as consisting of "great irons," the prefix for "wood" is very properly omitted. In all probability it was an enclosure in which to keep cattle (*see* line 11). The date, eighteenth year of Nabopolassar, corresponds with the year 608 B.C.

The fourth is a fairly large contract-tablet, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches long by $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide. The 22 lines of writing with which it is inscribed are published by the Rev. J. M. Strassmaier, S.J., in his "Inschriften von Darius." As Strassmaier's copy is fairly good (his text contains only two unimportant mistakes) I do not repeat the inscription here. The mutilated impression of a cylinder-seal with which the blank space on the obverse is impressed, is of little value—it represents simply a shaven priest in adoration before a representation of the lunar crescent, raised on the conventional

pedestal which generally occurs in scenes of this kind. What gives to this tablet a certain importance, however, is the fact that it has on the edges two Aramaic docketts which, though they are not very clear, are nevertheless worthy of notice, especially as they have not been published.¹

The following is a transcription and translation of the not uninteresting text of this document:—

TRANSCRIPTION.

Šelašâ (immer) par-ra-tu^m (pl.) ak-ka-di-i-tu^m
 ša Ÿ Zêru-Bâbili D.S. abli-šu ša Ÿ Mu-te-e-ri-šu
 ina muḫ-ḫi Ÿ D.P. Marduk-ri-man-ni abli-šu ša
 Ÿ Bêl-uballit̄ abil D.P. ni-šur gi-ni-e.
 Ina âraḫ Simanni (immer) par-ra-tu^m (pl.) -am (?)
 šelašâ ak-ka-di-i-tu^m bab-ba-ni-tu^m
 ina Bâbili D.S.
 i-nam-din.
 D.P. Mu-kin-nu Ÿ Nabû-êṭir-napsâti abli-šu
 ša Ÿ Kal-ba-a Ÿ D.P. Mâr-bêti-iq-bi
 abli-šu ša Ÿ Nabû-zêr-ibaš-ši abil Ÿ Ban-a-ša-îli-ia
 Ÿ Gab-bi-Bêl-um-ma abli-šu ša
 Ÿ Nabû-za-ba-du Ÿ Ni-din-tu-Bêl abli-šu ša
 Ÿ D.P. Marduk-êṭir Ÿ D.P. Marduk-šum-ib-ni
 abli-šu ša Ÿ Nabû-šum-išk-un abil Ÿ D.P. Sin-tab-ni
 Ÿ D.P. Za-ri-qu-iddina âbli-šu ša Ÿ Bêl-uballit̄
 abil D.P. šangī D.P. Šamaš
 u D.P. rittu Ÿ Nabû-napiš-ti^m-ušur âbli-šu ša
 Ÿ Šupik-zêrī âbil Ÿ Mar-duk-u
 Bâbili D.S. âraḫ Aari, ūmu ribû
 šattu išten-êsrêtu Ÿ Da-a-ri-ia-wuš
 šarri Bâbili D.S. šarri [mâtâti]

TRANSLATION.

30 Akkadian ewes
 of Zêru-Bâbili son of Mutêrišu
 upon Marduk-rêmanni son of
 Bêl-uballit̄, son of the overseer (?) of the dues.
 In the month Sivan, the ewes,
 30 Akkadian ones, unblemished (?),
 in Babylon
 he shall give.
 Witnesses: Nabû-êṭir-napsâti, son
 of Kalbaa; Mâr-bêti-iqbî,
 son of Nabû-zêr-ibašši, son of Banâ-ša-îli-ia;

¹ Mr. Offord tells me that Dr. Boissier first pointed out to him the existence of these docketts.

*Gabbi-Belumma, son of
Nabû-zabadu ; Nidintu-Bêl, son of
Marduk-êtir ; Marduk-sum-ibni,
son of Nabû-sum-iskun descendant of Sin-tabni ;
Zariqu-iddina, son of Bêl-uballit,
descendant of the priest of Šamas ;
and the scribe, Nabû-napištim-ušur, son of
Šapik-zêri, descendant of Marduku.
Babylon, month Iyyar, day 4th,
year 11th, Darius,
king of Babylon (and) king of [countries].*

In the above translation I have not been deterred by the undesirability of making "Assyrian English" from giving it as literally as possible, as there would in any case be necessity for a certain amount of explanation.

To all appearance it is an agreement or contract to deliver 30 Akkadian ewes at a certain date. A free translation of the essential part of the contract would read as follows:—

"30 Akkadian ewes for Zêrû-Bâbili, son of Mutêrišu, are with Marduk-rêmanni, son of Bêl-uballit, descendant of the overseer (?) of the dues. He shall give the ewes, 30 Akkadian ones, unblemished (?), in Babylon in the month Sivan."

The word translated "for" is *ša*, which is used in the text referring to the robes for the statues of the gods—"2 mantles for (*ša*) the daughters of Ê-babara" translated above. The word rendered "with," *ina muh̄bi*, literally "upon," apparently indicates that the animals were in the possession of Marduk-rêmanni. Peiser, in his "Texte Juristischen und Geschäftlichen Inhalts" (Schrader's "Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek," vol. iv), translates *ša* (very freely) by "gehörig," and *ina muh̄bi* (in an equally free manner) by "zu erhalten von." His rendering, however, gives the sense correctly.

We now come to the portions unpublished by Strassmaier, namely, the Aramaic docketts. As before remarked, neither of them are very clear, but the four letters in the line written on the left-hand end are certainly מרדך, that is, Marduk or Merodach. From this we see that the name must be that of the person in whose possession the ewes were, Marduk-rêmanni, and on looking at the traces which follow, the lower part of a 7, and of another letter, are clearly visible. In all probability the

complete word was מרדכרמן, which would be the Aramaic form of the name in question.

The three letters on the edge between the obverse and the reverse are still more uncertain. The last seems to be ד, and I conjecture that the first and second may have been מר, making the first three letters of Marduk-rêmanni, which name, having been begun, was partly obliterated, probably because they wished to have it on the short left-hand edge, not on the longer edge between the obverse and the reverse.

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In the translation of the contract, I have transcribed *parratum* rather than *udratum* (Delitzsch), on account of the Syriac ܩܪܐ, "ewe." Apparently the term "Akkadian" (*Akkaditum*) denotes some special breed. With regard to the name Zêrû-Bâbili, it is to be noted that this is the same as the well-known Zerubbabel (better spelled Zerubabel, with one *b*), but is not on that account the name of a Jew, as any foreigner or stranger born at Babylon might, and sometimes did, bear it. It occurs many times in the inscriptions.

Marduk-rêmanni, the name which appears also in Aramaic characters on the edge, is a pure Babylonian name, meaning "Merodach, be gracious to me." It is the name of a well-known tradesman or merchant at the time the tablet was written (concerning the date of the document, see lower down). That we should have it so imperfectly reproduced in the Aramaic transcription was to be expected, as it was not the custom at this period to insert the vowels to any great extent. It is apparently on account of this that we have the Biblical Nebushazban (Jer. xxxix, 13) without any indication of the final *i*, which the Babylonian form, Nabû-šêzib-anni, would lead us to expect.

The absence of the vowels in this name, as in many others, has apparently caused the Massoretic pointer to go astray, as, indeed, was to be expected. To all appearance he has followed the rule for such words.

In the transcription of the word that I have translated "unblemished" (?), namely, *babbanētum*, I have followed Delitzsch. I have always felt, however, that the true transcription is *kurbanētum*, which would give an excellent etymology, for it would then be connected with the well-known word Corban, and indicate something perfect enough to be offered as a gift to God. The derivation and meaning that I propose would suit all the contexts with which it occurs—*šem kurbanū*, "a solemn word," *šumu kurbanū*, "a solemn expression," a garment, *ēššetum kurbanītum*, "new, perfect"—in fact, it could be applied to anything that was in a fit condition for sacred purposes.

A similar transaction, referring, however, to money instead of ewes, is printed (from my copy) by De Vogüé in the "Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum," pars ii, t. i, fasc. 1, pp. 73, 74. The transcription and translation there given are by the veteran Assyriologist, Professor Oppert. Marduk-rēmanni is again the contractor, and has his name in Aramaic characters on the edge, but in this case it is abbreviated, the first element only, מרדך, Marduk or Merodach, being written.

For the name Banâ-ša-īli-ia in line 11, Banâ-ša-ya is also a possible reading. To all appearance it is of the same nature as the common title Rabâ-ša-Ninip.

The date of Mr. Offord's tablet corresponds with 509 or 510 B.C., but De Vogüé supposes the tablet in the "Corpus" to be of the reign of Darius Nothus, 423 B.C., in which case the tablet here translated would belong to the year 412 B.C. I am inclined, however, to the earlier estimate. The transaction recorded by the tablet published by De Vogüé took place at Sippara, showing that Marduk-rēmanni did not confine his operations to one place.
