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

By Theophilus G. Pinches, Esq.

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 docks 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 J. N. Strassmaier, S.J., but the others are, as far as I know, unpublished.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 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 יָרִים, "hair," and יְרֵם, "barley," were represented by the same word in Assyro-Babylonian.

The length of the tablet is 2 3/4 inches, and the width or height 1 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:

I.

Tablet belonging to J. Offord, Esq., apparently referring to barley.
TRANSCRIPTION.

Obverse.

Isten-ešret ma-na šar-ti ša Ḫ.a-ḫū-u (?);
Ešra-sibet ma-na šar-ti ša Ḫamaš-aḫa-iddina;
Ḫamsa ma-na šar-ti ša Nabū-ḫēr-iddina abil Ḫu-šu-nu;
Selāš-īṣet bar ma-na šar-ti ša Ḫ.A-ḫu-šu-nu;
Selāš-īṣet ma-na šar-ti ša Ḫ.Na-ṣir.

Reverse.

Ešra-salset bar ma-na Nabū-ḫēr-iddina abil Ḫu-šu-nu.

Arḫu Nisannu, ûmu šiššēru, šattu ʾistēnērētu.

TRANSLATION.

11 mana, the barley of Ḫ.a-hū (?);
27 mana, the barley of Ḫamaš-aḫa-iddina;
50 mana, the barley of Nabū-ḫēr-iddina, son of . . . uaa (?);
39½ mana, the barley of Ḫu-šūnu;
22½ mana, the barley of Ḫidi-ilu;
31 mana, the barley of ḪNa-ṣir.

23½ mana Nabū-ḫēr-iddina
son of Ḫu-šu-nu.

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 šar' (see the “Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum,” pars ii, t. i, fasc. 1, p. 43). The transcription there given (which is my own) is šar'ē, and is based on the šar'ē of the Aramaic version of the tablet there published. The equivalent Syriac word is ša'artē, agreeing in form with the Assyro-Babylonian šarti, and the Hebrew šarti.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 šarti, 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-zer-iddinas have been added, so as to distinguish them. 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-baladah.

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. Oppord, Esq., referring to garments for the images of deities at Sippara.

The second tablet is 1½ 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.

Išṭen ma-na šanēšret šiqli šig-kann-me-da (šig) ta-kil-ti
maštaktu šīt-ta kušetī
šīt-ta maḫlapāti
ša d.P. māṛāti E-babar-ra
ni[baṭṭu] ša d.P. Bu-ne-ne
† D[u]-muq d.P. uš-bar
it-ta-din
Araḫ Aari ūmu tišū šattu šamiš-ēšetū.

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.
I mana 12 shekels of violet woollen stuff
the weight for two robes (and)
two mantles
for the divine daughters of E-habarra, (and)
the garment for the god Bunene,
Dumug, 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 נַלְבַּן, mostly translated ἰακύνθων, ἰακύνθιος 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, נ, 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—As, 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 Istar; 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 Sala; Anu, the god of the heavens, with his consort Anat; and Mišarum and Dānu, 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
The divine Daughters of F-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 xviii, 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 1½ 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 parizzá rabúti
ša ṣ D.P. Nergal-bél-úṣur
D.P. gal-la ša Šúl-lúm
na-du-u a-na Bél-uball-it
abîl ṣ Ala-hu-mur a-na
mi-sîr-tum na-dîn
arâḫ Ulûli (?) ūmu sîbá
šattu summa-tēṣētu ṣ Nabû-ābla-úṣur
šûr Babîlî D.s.
ṣ Bél-iddina u ṣ Abla-a ina qâṭâ
ṣ A-bu-nu ṣ D.P. mu-ša-ri-m alpē
maj-ru-
A railing of stout irons
which Nergal-bél-úṣur
servant of Sullum
fixed, to Bél-uballit
son of Ala-túmmur for
an enclosure has been sold.
Month Elul (?), day 7th,
year 18th, Nabopolassar,
king of Babylon.
Bél-iddina and Ablaa from the hands
of Aḥunu 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 parzillé rabûti, 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 mésīrum in line 6, however, which comes from the root ēṣēru, "to enclose," and is connected with the Hebrew יַבָּן, 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" (overlaying) 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," כְּעַח, is usurtu (construct case, usuratur), 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, 2½ inches long by 2¼ 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 dockets 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.**

Selasa (immer) par-ra-tum (pl.) ak-ka-di-i-tum
ša ša Zeru-Babili D.S. abli-šu ša ša Mu-te-e-ri-šu
inu mun-ḫi ša D.P. Marduk-ri-man-ni abli-šu ša
ša Bel-uballit šaš D.P. ni-sur gi-ne-e.
ša ana Simanni (immer) par-ra-tum (pl.) -am (?)
šelaša ak-ka-di-i-tum bab-ba-ni-tum
šaša Babili D.S.

D.P. Mu-kin-nu ša Nabu-ētir-napisati abli-šu
ša ša Kal-ba-a ša D.P. Mār-bēti-iq-bi
abli-šu ša ša Nabu-zēr-ibasit šaš D.P. Ban-a-ša-li-ia
ša Gab-bi-Bel-um-ma abli-šu ša
ša Nabu-zu-ba-du ša Ni-din-tu-Bel abli-šu ša
ša D.P. Marduk-ētir ša D.P. Marduk-šum-ib-ni
abli-šu ša ša Nabu-šum-isk-un šaš D.P. Sin-tab-ni
ša D.P. Za-ri-qaqiddina abli-šu ša ša Bel-uballit ša
šaša D.P. Šangī ša D.P. Šumâš
ša D.P. šitta ša Nabu-napisiti-im-usur abli-šu ša
ša Ṣupik-zēr šaš D.P. Mar-duk-u
šaša Babili D.S. Šarāh Aari, ūmu ribu
šaša Šattu šitten-širētu ša Da-ari-i-ia-wwis
ša šaša Babili D.S. šari (matâte)

**TRANSLATION.**

30 Akkadian ewes
of Zeru-Babili son of Mutērisu
upon Marduk-rēmānni son of
Bel-uballit, son of the overseer (?) of the dues.
In the month Siwan, the ewes,
30 Akkadian ones, unblemished (?)
in Babylon
he shall give.
Witnesses: Nabu-ētir-napisati, son
of Kalbaa; Mār-bēti-iqbi,
son of Nabu-zēr-ibasit, son of Band-aša-li-ia;

¹ Mr. Offord tells me that Dr. Boissier first pointed out to him the existence
of these dockets.
Gahbi-Bélumma, son of Nabú-zabádu; Nidintu-Bél, son of Marduk-šúr; Marduk-sum-šúru, son of Nabú-sum-iskun descendant of Sin-tabú; Zariq-iddína, son of Bel-uballit, descendant of the priest of Šamaš; and the scribe, Nabú-napšisšum-usur, son of Šapik-zērī, descendant of Marduk. Babylon, month Iyjar, 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 Zerù-Babili, son of Mutērīšu, are with Marduk-rēmmani, son of Bēl-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 Š-babara” translated above. The word rendered “with,” ina muḫḫi, literally “upon,” apparently indicates that the animals were in the possession of Marduk-rēmmani. Peiser, in his “Texte Juristischen und Geschäftlichen Inhalts” (Schrader’s “Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek,” vol. iv), translates ša (very freely) by “gehörig,” and ina muḫḫi (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 dockets. As before remarked, neither of them are very clear, but the four letters in the line written on the left-hand end are certainly מִדָו, 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-rēmmani, and on looking at the traces which follow, the lower part of a מ, and of another letter, are clearly visible. In all probability the
The complete word was על הפועל, 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 כ, making the first three letters of Marduk-rēmanni, 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.

In the translation of the contract, I have transcribed parratum rather than udratum (Delitzsch), on account of the Syriac אֹּלָל, "ewe." Apparently the term "Akkadian" (Akkaditum) denotes some special breed. With regard to the name Zērū-Bābili, it is to be noted that this is the same as the well-known Zerubbabel (better spelled Zerubabel, with one ב), 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-rēmanni, 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 ı, which the Babylonian form, Nabû-šēzib-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 kurbānētum, 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—tem kurbānā, "a solemn word," šumu kurbānā, "a solemn expression," a garment, ēšētum kurbanētum, "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, מֶרְדֵּק, Marduk or Merodach, being written.

For the name Banā-ša-ili-ia in line 11, Banā-ša-ya is also a possible reading. To all appearance it is of the same nature as the common title Rabā-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.