

THE BABYLONIAN TABLET IN THE COLLEGE
MUSEUM, BEIRÛT.

By THEOPHILUS G. PINCHES.

It was with great interest that I read the note of Professor Porter upon the tablet which was published in the last *Quarterly Statement* (p. 124) of the Palestine Exploration Fund. A glance at the excellent process-block given therewith at once showed me that the text was an official date of the time of Samsu-iluna, the son and successor of Hammurabi (later Ammurapi), the Amraphel of Genesis xiv, 1. On my writing to the Secretary of this Society, Mr. G. Armstrong, he was kind enough to send me a photograph of the tablet, from which I was able to make the copy which accompanies these notes.

I have said that this tablet gives the official text of a date of the reign of Samsu-iluna, and this may, perhaps, need a little explanation. During the earlier periods of Babylonian history, it was the custom to date, not by an era, nor by the regnal years of their kings, nor (like the Assyrians) by the years of office of the eponyms, but by the principal event which distinguished the year that it was desired to indicate. For this purpose, in order that there should be no mistake about the date, it was necessary that there should be uniformity, and it must have been the custom to send out to the recognised scribes an indication of the event that was to serve for this purpose. As there is apparently nothing on the little tablet but the historical fact with which it is inscribed, I conjecture that it is one of the documents used for the purpose I have mentioned, namely, the communication to the scribes of the event of the year chosen for them to date by.

With the view of testing this, I consulted the inscriptions from Tel-Sifr, published by Strassmaier, and succeeded in finding, attached to two contracts, copies of this date, one of them in full, the other with the second clause omitted, the scribe apparently not thinking it worth while to write out the whole. Both these texts give variants, and one gives completions, which will be noticed in their place.

The following is a transcription of the text, with the completions of the last two lines, given by the tablet 33161, better known as B. 4:—

TRANSCRIPTION.

Mu Sa-am-su-i-lu-na lugal-e
 giš-ku šu-nir ig-babar-ra
 gušqi-kubabbar me-te ê-e-gi
 D.P. Amar-uduka-ra a-mu-na-šub
 Ê-sag-il-la mûla ana-[kime].
 mi-ni-in-mul-[la-a].






TRANSLATION.

*Year Samsu-iluna, the king,
 a bright-shining mace,
 gold (and) silver, the glory of the temple,
 to Merodach dedicated.
 Ê-sagila like the stars of heaven
 he made to shine.*

B. 4 has the character *ê*, "house" or "temple" before *mete*, but this may be simply a mistake by the scribe, who was thinking of the temple called *Ê-mete*. The tablet 33240, better known as B. 83, has *me-te-e*, implying that the second vowel of the word was long. B. 4 omits *e* after *ê*, and reads *ê-gi* simply.

B. 4 has *-gi* after *Ê-sagila*, making the expression "the temple of Sagila," or "the temple of the high head."

In support of the rendering I have given, I offer the following remarks:—

The first group of the second line, , I have been unable to find in the explanatory lists, and I was therefore obliged to decompose it into what are evidently its component parts, namely,  = *kakku*, "weapon," and  = *šurinnu*, apparently "stalk" or "shaft" (of a column, &c.). I take the whole to mean "staff of office," "mace," or something of the kind. The last three characters, , *ig-babar-ra*, apparently have their ordinary meaning, "that which is bright." The first four characters of the third line are the usual words for "gold" and "silver," and present no difficulty whatever. , *me-te*, is equivalent to the Semitic Babylonian *sintu*, "adornment," "decoration," especially that which formed the special emblem of a temple, a god, or a king. The temple

𒂗𒍪 𒀭 𒂗𒍪, *Ê-mete*, equivalent to the Sem. Bab. *bêt simti* or *simâti* (plu.), probably means "the house of the dignity" (or "honour") of divinity.

A-nu-na-šub in line 4 is, to all appearances, an Akkadian separable verb, the two component parts being 𒀭 𒂗, *A-ŠUB*. Another form, *A-nu-ŠUB*, with the pronominal infix *na* omitted, is also found. The meaning is fairly certain.

In the second phrase (lines 5 and 6) we have an example of a root used both as a noun and a verb. This is the word *mula*, "star," the verb being seen in *mininmullā*, "it he made bright." *Mininmullaa* is also a possible reading, and the form found in this place is possibly short for that written with a terminal *m* (*mininmullām* or *mininmullaam*).

The following is a free rendering of this interesting date:—

"Year Samsu-iluna, the king, dedicated to Merodach a bright-shining mace and gold and silver (or, of gold and silver), the glory of the temple. He made *Ê-sagila* to shine like the stars of heaven."

I give here the text in late Babylonian characters, with the variants from B. 4 and B. 83:—

𒂗𒍪 𒀭 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪
 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪
 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪¹ 𒀭 𒂗𒍪² 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪³ 𒂗𒍪
 𒀭 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪 𒂗𒍪
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¹ B. 4 here inserts 𒂗𒍪, which would lead one to suppose that the scribe who wrote this tablet was thinking at the time of the temple 𒂗𒍪 𒀭 𒂗𒍪, *Ê-mete*. 𒂗𒍪 would, however, be a better reading, as it would supply a genitive suffix (-gi) to the foregoing words (*gušqi-babbara-gi*, "of gold and silver"), but the traces are not those of the 𒂗𒍪 at the end of the line.

² B. 83 (tablet) here inserts 𒂗𒍪, making *me-te-e*. The envelope has the reading of the text.

³ B. 4 omits 𒂗𒍪.

⁴ B. 4 here inserts 𒂗𒍪, making *Ê-sagila-gi*, "the temple of the high head." The characters in outline are completed from B. 4.

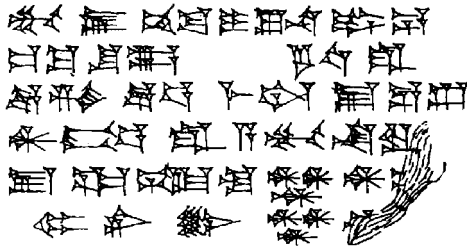
As Samsu-iluna reigned about 2100 B.C., this is one of the earliest notices of the celebrated temple-tower known as Ê-sagila extant. It is probable that there were but a few of the kings of Babylonia who did not undertake, at some time or other, to extend or beautify it. Nebuchadnezzar, so celebrated in sacred history, refers, in several inscriptions, to what he did in that direction, and in the India House inscription he speaks of the great work that he had undertaken upon it in the following way:—

“The vessels of the temple Ê-sagila
with massive gold—
the bark Ma-kua (Merodach’s shrine) with electrum and stones—
I made glorious
like the stars of heaven.
The fanes of Babylon
I caused to be rebuilt and endowed.
Of Ê-temen-ana-kia
with brick and bright lapis-stone
I reared its head.
To rebuild Ê-sagila
my heart urged me—
constantly did I set myself,” &c., &c.

From the above it would seem as if the temple Ê-temen-ana-kia, which Nebuchadnezzar elsewhere calls “the Tower of Babel” (*zikkurat Bâbîli*), were the same as, or formed part of, the temple Ê-sagila. The reference to it comes between this king’s description of making the vessels of Ê-sagila glorious with electrum and precious stones, the glorifying of the portable shrine of the god “like the stars of heaven” (this expression occurs in the Beirût tablet), and his determination to restore Ê-sagila, the carrying out of which he immediately proceeds to relate. If Ê-sagila and Ê-temen-ana-kia be one and the same, then there is at least one thing that may be regarded as certain, and that is, that this is the edifice which the Babylonians regarded as the Tower of Babel.¹ The name, moreover, Ê-sagila, “the house of the high head,” would suggest that it was a taller structure than was usual even among buildings which the Babylonians

¹ A brick inscription of Esarhaddon, from the mound called Amran, practically identifies Ê-sagila and Ê-temen-ana-kia as one and the same, and at the same time indicates the site.

were accustomed to carry to a great height, and that it was intended to be a tower "whose top should be in the heavens," as is related in Genesis xi, 4.



The Text of the Beirût Tablet from the Photograph.

THE DEAD SEA.

By GRAY HILL, Esq.

I HAVE not observed any reference in the *Quarterly Statement* to the fact that the surface of the Dead Sea has risen considerably of late years. The following is an extract from Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake's report, which appeared in the *Statement* for 1874, p. 188 :—
 "A curious fact with regard to the Dead Sea is to be noticed, as showing that the bottom is still subsiding. At the southern end the fords between the Lisân and the western shore are now impassable owing to the depth of the water, though I have been told by men who used them that they were in no places more than 3 feet deep some 15 or 20 years ago. Again, the causeway which connects the Rujm el-Bahr with the mainland has, according to the Arabs, been submerged for 12 or 15 years, though before that time it was frequently dry. The Arabs say that the level of the water varies much in different years, and is not dependent on the rainfall but on the sea itself, as they express it."

In speaking of the bottom as "subsiding," Mr. Drake must have referred to the portions which he specifies, viz., the causeway to the "Rujm," and the place of the former ford. If the whole of the bottom subsided, the whole of the water in the lake would subside with it. The circumstances which he mentions