

THE NEW CUNEIFORM TABLET FROM GEZER.¹

By the Rev. C. H. W. JOHNS, M.A., *Lecturer in Assyriology, Queens' College, Cambridge, and King's College, London.*

THE Palestine Exploration Fund is to be congratulated most heartily on this remarkable confirmation of its former more doubtful find. While that seemed likely enough to have been brought from Assyria to Gezer, this separate discovery must assure



Cuneiform Tablet from Gezer. (Obverse.)

all but the obstinately sceptical that both tablets are genuine products of the ancient dwellers at Gezer. The problems still remain unsolved as to the full significance of Assyrian notaries and officials there in Assurbanipal's reign, and the extent of this Assyrian influence in Judah.

The tablet is the upper part, probably less than half, of a deed of sale of a field, following, as far as preserved, the regular formula of an Assyrian deed of sale. The text reads:—

¹ See p. 185.

Obverse—*Reverse—**Lower Edge—*

This may be transliterated as follows:—

Obverse—

1. TAK-ŠID (= kumuk) D.P. Na-tan-la-u
2. bêl A-ŠÁ (= eḳli) SE (= tadani)-a-ni.

[Three seal impressions.]

3. BAR A-ŠÁ (= eḳli) SUḪ (= kimmat) D.P. Si-ni-i
4. SUḪ (= kimmat) D.P. Si-ni-i
-

Reverse—

1. pân D.P.
2. pân D.P. Bu-sik . . . is
3. pân D.P. Zêr-DU (= ukîn)
4. pân D.P. Nêrgal-šar-ušur
5. arhi Šabaṭi ūmi IV (Kan)

Lower Edge—

1. lim-mu D.P. Aḫi-ilai.
2. amêlu ša-kin Gar-ga-meš.

TRANSLATION.

Obverse—

1. The seal of Natan-Iau
2. the owner of the field made over
3. (area) of field next Sinî
4. next Sinî
-

Reverse—

1. in the presence of
 2. in the presence of Bu-sik- is
 3. in the presence of Zêr-ukîn
 4. in the presence of Nêrgal-šar-ušur
 5. in the month Shebat, fourth day.
1. Eponymy of Ahi-ilai
 2. šaknu of Carchemish.

The words printed in capitals are the names of the signs used to form ideograms, which are given in small type in the brackets as read in Assyrian. Thus, in *Obv.* l. 2, *SE* is the name of the sixth sign which is the ideogram for the verb *nadânu* and all its derivatives. The following *a-ni* show that we are to take that part of the verb, or its derivative, which ends in *ani*. On some contracts we have the word spelt out syllabically *ta-da-a-ni*.

D.P. is often used to denote the vertical wedge which indicates a personal name. Some scholars write (h) for *homo*, which is neither Assyrian nor English; some write (m) for *man*. But in English it is quite sufficiently indicated by the capital letter with which we begin a proper name.

The name Natan-Iau is, of course, the same as Nethaniah. The form in which the name Yahweh appears in the Assyrian historical inscriptions in such names as Hezekiah is Ia-u, as here.

In line 3, deeds of sale usually begin with a statement of the amount of land, measured in homers and subdivisions of the homer. One of these subdivisions is indicated by the sign *BAR*, which was certainly written here. What the relation was between the homer and its subdivisions is not known. It seems likely that the area here was "one homer and *BAR* part." The next sign, called *SUH*, is the ideogram for "next to." It is usually read *kimmatu*, on the authority of the syllabaries, but the only variant syllabic

spelling I know in these contracts is *um-mi*, "alongside." This sign always introduces the name of the neighbour. It is usual in deeds of sale to give the names of the four neighbours whose fields adjoined that sold, or else the roads, streams, or other natural boundaries.

In line 4, the breakage of the tablet has caused several signs to disappear entirely, but the upper wedges of *SUH* occur again below the *eklu* of line 3. The neighbour's name is almost certainly the same as in line 3, though only the tops of the wedges of the first two characters are left. So this man was neighbour on two sides of the field.

The reverse preserves parts of the names of four witnesses. Of the first name no intelligible traces are left. The next name is a very singular one. On the photograph it looked very like Bu-sik-ti-is. The sign *bu* has other values, *pu*, *gid*, *sir*, etc. The sign *sik* may be read *šik*, and for the *k* can be read *g* or *q*. The sign has also the value *pik*, etc. Each of these two signs may be an ideogram. The photograph certainly seems to have the sign *ti* next, but the cast suggests *ru*, *gir*, or *al*. The final *is* seems to be certain. It is next to impossible to say what name could be meant by these signs. I know of no Assyrian name that would fit them all.

The next name, Zêr-ukîn, is quite plain, and it was the name of a witness, son of one Tebetai, also on the former deed of sale discovered by Mr. Macalister, published in *Quarterly Statement*, July, 1904. It probably indicates the same person in both cases. The last witness, generally the scribe who drew up the deed, bore the well-known name Nergalsharezer, the Neriglissar of the Greeks.

The date raises some interesting points. It is given as the Eponymy of Ahi-ilai. So the scribes at Gezer knew who was Eponym that year, at any rate as late as Shebat. The date assigned to this Eponymy by G. Smith in his Assyrian Eponym Canon was B.C. 647, but in the notes to his Inscriptions of Assurbanipal, p. 321, he admitted that his earlier conjecture might be corrected to B.C. 648. I think that in my articles on the Chronology of Ašurbânipal's reign, in the Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archæology, I have proved that the date was B.C. 649. Of course, that means that Ahi-ilai began his Eponymy with the year which began on the 1st of Nisan B.C. 649; but, as Shebat was 11 months later, the date of the tablet comes into B.C. 648. How far, depends, of course, on when Nisan fell in B.C. 649. Some scholars seem to

be positive that they know when this took place ; I cannot venture a guess.

The name of the Eponym deserves a few remarks. The signs *AN-A-A*, which I follow Professor C. Bezold in reading *ilai*, have been read *Malik*, *Malkatu*, *malik*, or *Aya*, by various scholars. So far as they have stated their reasons, these seem to me to be insufficient. There seem to be two variants which speak strongly against all of them. One is *Ahê-AN-A-A*, and another *Ahi-li-i*. It is difficult to suppose that these can point to any other reading than that which I adopt. What *ilai* means exactly, I cannot be sure. It might perhaps be a way of writing *ili*, "my god"; or it may be for *ilê'i*, "is: powerful." Even the element *Ahi*, or *Ahê*, is not clear in meaning. But a whole article could be written on the name and its meanings. We may hope to know some day.

Knowledge grows apace. We did not know before what was *Ahi-ilai's* office. This tablet tells us, once for all. He was *šaknu*, or viceroy, of Carchemish. When I wrote my articles on the Chronology of Ašurbânipal's reign, I conjectured, from other sources, that he was *šaknu* of Nineveh. As this was probably a higher position, we may conclude that he was raised to that post later than B.C. 649.

When I wrote my note on the former Gezer tablet I quoted G. Smith's date for Sagabba without comment, because that was scarcely the place for a discussion which must be lengthy and highly technical. Now I would put it in B.C. 651. In any case, the dates of the two tablets are separated by only one Eponymy, that of Bêl-Harrân-šadûa, the *šaknu* of Tyre.

It is very interesting to have the domination of Assyria at Gezer so clearly made out for this period. We may note that, so far as this tablet is concerned, there is no mention of the locality where it was drawn up. But this second discovery is of great value as supporting the genuineness of the first, and encourages us to hope for many more. There probably were many such kept in the private deed boxes of the inhabitants of Gezer, and we may hope for letters as well.