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A NEW FRAGMENT OF THE HISTORY OF
NEBUCHADNEZZAR III.

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Read 3rd December, 1878.

It is difficult to find any satisfactory reason to account for the great dearth of records of the political history of the later Babylonian empire, especially when we consider that from her old rival, Assyria, a nation of the same race and language, we have an abundant store of records, which, judging from the results of the excavations still going on in that country, seem to be inexhaustible. Although the Babylonians were, like the Assyrians, at the same time both a literary and a warlike people, unlike the Assyrians, records of events by their own scribes are almost wholly wanting.

The troubled state of the empire during the time of the Assyrian ascendancy most likely not only prevented the writing of full and complete records, but caused the destruction of those then existing, so that almost all our knowledge of the political history of Babylonia during the earlier times is derived from Assyrian sources, and then only when either for peace or war the two nations came together. The great work bearing upon these meetings was the Synchronous History of Assyria and Babylonia,¹ which is written in as impartial a manner as was possible to the Assyrian scribe. The majority of the meetings referred to are warlike, but whether for peace or war the Assyrians seem almost always to have had the advantage. This Synchronous History shows a most unsettled state of affairs in Babylonia—

¹ "Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch.," Vol. II, p. 119.

dissensions and revolts within, and without the hostile Assyrians seizing every opportunity for harassing the unfortunate Babylonians. There is little wonder therefore that we find so few records of this period.

But even after the fall of the Assyrian monarchy, Babylonian historical records are still wanting. It is true that we have inscribed bricks and cylinders in abundance, but they contain what may be called the "architectural history" of the country, being merely long accounts of the palaces and temples erected by its kings, mingled with long and pious addresses to the gods of the land, but not one allusion to any political or other historical event. Perhaps the piety of the Babylonians in these times exceeded any desire to perpetuate the record of their victories. But it is likelier that the more expensive, though more perishable material papyrus, was used on most occasions for the royal records. It may be mentioned that the large collection of over two thousand Babylonian tablets acquired for the British Museum by the late George Smith contains not one historical text; but for a long time it has been felt that Babylonian historical records, although possibly never very numerous, must have existed.

About two months ago a small collection of Babylonian inscribed tablets was offered for sale to the British Museum. It seemed to consist of the usual fragments of mathematical, astrological, and mythological texts. On examination, however, a small fragment was found among them, about two inches long by an inch and three-quarters broad, containing an allusion to the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar, and giving a fragmentary account of a warlike expedition to the land of Misir. A second examination of the same collection brought to light another small fragment of the same text, which, on being joined to the first piece found, completed the ends of fourteen lines of the obverse, and sixteen lines of the reverse of the tablet.

In consequence of the mutilated state of this record of Nebuchadnezzar's annals, I will only give here a summary of its contents. The text, with transliteration and translation, will be found on pages 218-222.

In the opening lines Nebuchadnezzar seems to be addressing some deity, perhaps the god Bel, whose worship was in high favour with the Babylonians. In the address some former victories are referred to, Nebuchadnezzar giving to the god the glory of having caused his hands in former days to fight and to rest, of enlarging his kingdom, and of exalting the kings over the people. The inscription then speaks of some prince who, trusting to his army, made war. The account of this prince's depredations, however, is lost. The "37th year of Nebuchadnezzar king of the country of [Babylon]" is then mentioned, and the next line states that some one, evidently Nebuchadnezzar's general, went to Mişir to do battle.

The reverse of the tablet begins by stating that the king of Mişir collected his troops, but, unfortunately, the name of the king of Mişir is lost (unless the syllable *-su*, which immediately precedes the sign for king, form part of it). The king, the tablet continues, caused his army to march. The next line speaks of a remote district within the sea, most likely the island of Cyprus. Soldiers, horses, and chariots are then mentioned, and the following line tells of the hostile king having trusted to some persons who had promised to help him, but who the helpers were does not appear. After this the ends of a few lines, making no connected sense, are all that remain, and then the record breaks off altogether. In consequence of the fragmentary state of the inscription, the meaning of many of the words is very doubtful, and the probable contents can only be inferred from what is left, but this much is certain, that in the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon an expedition was made to Mişir, in order to check the king of that country who was evidently harrying a part of Babylonia.

One or two important points are left undetermined by this inscription. Is the Nebuchadnezzar here mentioned the king whose name is so familiar to us from the frequent mention made of him in Sacred History, or is he either of the two kings of the same name who preceded that king? And with what district is the country of Mişir against which he made war to be identified?

As the first Nebuchadnezzar is recorded to have reigned thirty years, and the second only two years, if these statements of the length of their reigns be correct, an expedition in the thirty-seventh year of either is impossible; and though it may be urged that there is no record of Nebuchadnezzar III having made any expedition after the thirty-third year of his reign, it does not appear from the new fragment that the king led the expedition himself, but it seems from the wording of the document as if he appointed somebody as commander-in-chief to conduct the expedition. To this may be added that the writing on the fragment is by no means archaic, and though it is not impossible that it may be a copy of an older text, there is not the slightest indication that such is the case. Everything, so far, points to Nebuchadnezzar III as the king of Babylon under whom the expedition took place.

As to the country of Mişir, the likeness of this name to that of Muşur, the name commonly given to Egypt in the Assyrian records, will at once be seen; the only difference being the substitution of *i* for *u* in both syllables of the word. The ceaseless animosity manifested by the Egyptians towards the Babylonians during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar III seems to favour the conjecture that Egypt is the country referred to.

After the division of the fallen Assyrian monarchy among its conquerors, some discussion arose between Egypt and Babylon about, it is thought, the boundaries of their respective portions. The result of this discussion was that, in the year 605 B.C., Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, sent his son Nebuchadnezzar against Necho king of Egypt, who was encamped at Karkemish. The Egyptians were completely routed, and the young general pursued them as far as the borders of Egypt.

While Nebuchadnezzar was engaged in chastising the Egyptians his father Nabopolassar died, and he hastened to Babylon to take possession of the throne. He was soon called away again, however, by the revolt of the kings of Palestine, who are supposed to have been prompted to this step by the Egyptians. Nebuchadnezzar was at that time occupied with other things, and could not attend to these

disturbances till the year 598 B.C., when he again marched into Palestine and, attacking Tyre on the way, entered and occupied the kingdom of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar now deposed Jehoiachin (whom the Jews had made king on the death of his father Jehoiakim) and set his uncle Zedekiah upon the throne, so as to have a ruler in Judah who owed his rise to him, and not to the influence of the Egyptian king; and Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah swear by Jehovah to be faithful to him. He then carried the young Jewish king whom he had deposed, together with numerous other captives, into Babylonia. Zedekiah, encouraged by the king of Egypt, did as his predecessors had done, and, in spite of his oath, made a treaty with the kings of Tyre, Sidon, Moab, Edom, and Ammon to revolt, under the leadership of Egypt, against Babylonia.

Nebuchadnezzar was at this time engaged in an expedition against Elam, then a rather powerful state. We do not know what brought the Babylonians into hostility with the Elamites, but the result of the expedition was to bring the whole kingdom of Elam within the boundaries of the Babylonian monarchy.

Apries or Hophra, king of Egypt, entered with energy into the Syrian league, and occupied with his fleet many portions of the coast of Phœnicia. Nebuchadnezzar marched in the year 589 B.C. into Syria, and made Riblah in Hamath his head-quarters. From this place he directed his troops, under the command of his general, Nabuzaradan, against Palestine. Jerusalem was the centre of the revolt, though the Jews within it were divided into two parties—one in favour of submission to the Babylonian king, the other of resistance. Against Jerusalem, therefore, Nabuzaradan now directed his march, and besieged the city, to the relief of which Hophra marched after having assembled his army. On the advance of the Egyptian troops Nabuzaradan raised the siege and retired; but from some unknown cause the Egyptians abandoned their enterprise, and left Jerusalem to its fate. Nabuzaradan now vigorously besieged Jerusalem, and the city fell in the year 587 B.C. The sack of the city, the destruction of the Temple, and the carrying away of its

sacred vessels are well known. Zedekiah, attempting to save himself by flight, was captured and carried before Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian king had the barbarity to cause Zedekiah's sons to be put to death before his face, and then to put out the eyes of Zedekiah himself.

Nebuchadnezzar now turned to chastise the other powers of Palestine for the part they had taken in the revolt, and in the year 586 B.C. he began the siege of Tyre, one of the great maritime powers of the world. For thirteen years the army of Nebuchadnezzar tried in vain to take it, and the result of his lengthy siege is doubtful, the city being situated in a most excellent position for resisting a siege. At any rate, if Nebuchadnezzar did take it, he gained very little in return for the trouble and expense of a thirteen years' siege.

While besieging Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar's attention was attracted for a time by affairs in Media, a dispute having arisen between that country and Lydia on account of some fugitives who had fled from Cyaxeres king of Media, and taken refuge with Alyattes king of Lydia. The Lydians refused to deliver up the fugitives, and a war was begun in consequence in the year 590 B.C. This war is said to have been carried on between the two powers for five years, neither side gaining any lasting advantage. At the end of this time, while the two armies were engaged in battle, an eclipse of the sun took place, and both armies taking this as an omen, the king of Cilicia and Nebuchadnezzar meanwhile seized the opportunity for a reconciliation.

Meanwhile the Jews had again revolted, and murdered Gedaliah, the governor whom Nebuchadnezzar had set over them, and many of the people hoping to evade the vengeance of the Babylonian monarch, which they felt would fall upon them on account of the deed, fled into Egypt. Besides the Jews, the neighbouring tribes were also disaffected, and the length of the siege of Tyre, which still held out, gave great encouragement to the enemies of Babylonia in that quarter. In the year 582 B.C. a new Babylonian force marched into Palestine, and again ravaged the kingdom of Judah, sending the last of her people captive to Babylon.

When at the end of the thirteen years Tyre fell, Egypt

still remained the deadly foe of the Babylonian monarch. She had fomented and encouraged every rebellion in Palestine, and by her interference in the affairs of that district, had brought down upon herself the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar. In the year 572 B.C. the Babylonian monarch marched at the head of his army into Egypt, completely overrunning the country, and plundering on every side. Hophra, the king of Egypt, was defeated. He submitted to Nebuchadnezzar, who deposed him, and placed upon the throne a general named Ahmes or Amasis, who ruled the country as a vassal of the king of Babylonia.



It is generally believed that this conquest of Egypt closed the campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar, and that now, satiated with the glories of thirty-three years of conquest, he occupied himself during the remainder of his reign with the adornment of Babylon and the principal cities of his land. The new fragment, however, speaks unmistakably of an expedition in the 37th year of his reign, four years later than the date of his supposed last expedition. It is difficult on this account to identify this expedition with any of those of which the record has come down to us. This being so, it will be necessary to try to find out why it took place, and under what circumstances. We are enabled to do this with some probability of arriving at a right conclusion, by means of the character which, as before stated, precedes the words "king of Mišir." Besides this complete character, there is also part of a character which may be Υ , the whole reading *a-su*, and the only name of a king of Egypt of this period which ends with *as* is Ahmes or Amasis, the general who was set on the throne of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar after the defeat of Hophra. The Babylonian form of Amasis would probably be *A-ma-a-su*.

It seems therefore likely that Amasis revolted, and that Nebuchadnezzar was obliged to send a force to Egypt to put down the revolt. The continued hostility of Egypt against Babylonia, which had lasted so long, was no doubt hard to extinguish, and probably also Amasis was actuated by the very natural desire to become totally independent of Babylonia.

We do not learn from any source that the rebellious vassal was deposed, as the length of his reign is set down at forty-five years. It is probable that the king of Babylonia was more merciful towards rebels during the latter part of his reign than he had been in the former part, and that he reinstated Amasis and pardoned him for his ingratitude.



Small as the fragment is, it throws a fresh ray of light upon ancient history at a most important, as well as most interesting, period. It is much to be regretted that more of the tablet has not been preserved, for at most we possess only one-eighth part of the whole—probably considerably less. The discovery of this fragment shows the rich harvest we may expect from the mounds of Babylonia, which have not yet been by any means systematically explored. It is to be hoped that future explorations in that country, of whose ancient history we know as yet so little, will yield a good store of the riches which its libraries must have contained; for it is impossible that so great a nation should have passed away without leaving more than one record of the political events in which it had taken part.



OBVERSE.



1.  
 - uš - šu
 *him*



2.  
 ša - a - šu
 *that*

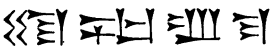

3.  
 šu - um - šu
 *his name*


4.  
 ku - um - ma
 *was exalted(?) and*


5.  
 u - mal a - a - bi - a
 *he filled, my enemies*


6.  
 tu - bil - la tu - ša - li - iṣ lib - bi
 *thou didst destroy, thou causedst my heart to rejoice*

7.  
 ume - šu *ka*tā
 [*in*] those days (*my*) hands

 
 tu - šak - šid - ma tu - nî - hi
thou madest to capture, thou gavest rest

8.  [tu-] še - piš šarr - û - ti - a
 [thou] causedest to make, my kingdom



 tu - šar - bâ
 thou madest to increase


9.  [e-] li - šu - nu šarrâni
 over them kings



 ta - na - , - id kar - du - ti - šu
 thou exaltedst, his warriors

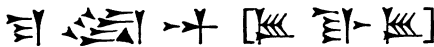
10.  me apkalli - šu alaki su
 his prince, his paths







 ki - ma - šu - tam
 like him










11.  bu - uš i - ta - a - am
 made, he divided,


 a - na ummani - šu u - [tak - kil] - ma
 to his army he [trusted] and





12.  ša il - tâl i - ki - ir
 who prayed, hastened


 ma - ħar ilâni [rabûti]
 before the [great] gods







13.     
 šanatu šīlaša'a sibtu'u
 year thirty-seventh of

      [  ]
 D.P. Nabu - kudurri - ušur šar mât [Tin - tir - ki]
Nebuchadnezzar king of the country [of Babylon]










14.       
 Mi - šir a - na e - piš
 [to] Mišir to make






  [ ]
 taḫazi il - [lik - ma]
 war he w[ent]


REVERSE.

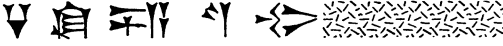
1.      
 [ummani-šu A-ma-] a - su šar Mi - šir
 [his army Amā]sis king of Mišir

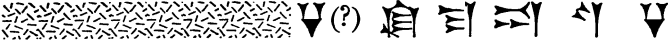
  
 ipḫir - ma
 collected and

2.         
 [il-li] - ku u - ša - ra - bu - tu
 [his soldiers we]nt, they spread abroad.


   [] 
 I - a - a - te (?)
 As for me (?)

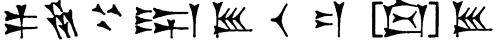
3. 
 na(?) - gi - i ni - su - tu
 a remote district,



 ša ki - rib tam - tim
 which (is) within the sea


4. 
 ša - ki mâ - du - tam ša
 .. many from the



 ki - rib mât Mi - šir
 midst of the country of Mišir

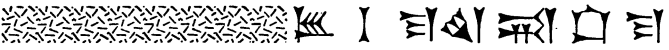

5. 
 - na - ši kakki
 soldier(s),


 murniski u D.P. [narkab]âti
 horses, and [chariots]





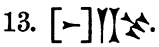



6. 
 ri - šu - ti - šu
 [for] his help


 id -kam - ma
 he assembled and



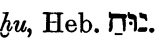
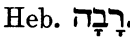

7. 
 u - ka - a ma - ħar - šu
 looked before him

8. 
 - šu it - ta - kil - ma
 his [army] he trusted and
9. 
 - šak - kan te - e - mu
 fixed a command

The ends of the following seven lines are all that now appear:—

10. . 11. . 12.  . 13. .
14. . 15. 16.  .

NOTES.

6. *Tubilla*, 2nd pers. sing. masc. aorist Pael of *balú*
 Heb. .
- Tušališ*, 2nd pers. sing. masc. aorist Shaphel of *elišu*,
 Heb. .
7. *Tušakšid*, 2nd pers. sing. masc. aorist Shaphel of *kašadu*.
Tuníhi, 2nd pers. sing. masc. aorist Pael of *náhu*, Heb. .
8. *Tušepiš*, 2nd pers. sing. masc. aorist Shaphel of *epišu*.
Tušarba, 2nd pers. sing. masc. aorist Shaphel of *rabú*,
 Heb. .
9. *Tana'id*, 2nd pers. sing. masc. aorist Kal of *na'adu*,
 Arab. .

11. *Ita'am*, 3rd pers. sing. masc. Kal of *ta'amu*, Heb. **אָמַת**, "to divide," or "be twin," a word very rarely used as a verb. The meaning of the root is made clear from several passages in the Cuneiform Inscriptions, amongst which may be noted the translation of the sign **𐎶** *bar*, both simple and reduplicate, by *tu'amu* "double" (W.A.I. III, p. 70, l. 175 and 180). *Bar* is also compounded in Akk. with its synonym **𐎶** *tab*¹ (W.A.I. II, pl. 7, 28, 29, *cd.*), forming the word **𐎶 𐎶** *bar-tab-ba*, "double," which, with the word for "door" (**𐎶 𐎶 𐎶**) is translated in Assyrian by *tu'ma[tu]* "folding doors."²
12. *Iltál*, 3rd pers. sing. masc. Iphtéal of *šálu*, Heb. **אָלַת**, with *l* for *š* before the inserted *t*.
- Ikír*, 3rd pers. sing. masc. Kal of *káru*.

REVERSE.

1. *Šar Mišir*. Thus written in the original, without **𐎶** *mátu*, "land," as one would have expected.
2. *Ušarabutu*, 3rd pers. plu. masc. aorist Pa'lel of *šarabutu*, "to stretch out," "to extend."

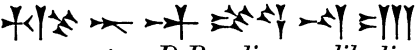



That this is a quadriliteral root, and not the Shaphel of a trilateral one, we learn from several passages in the bilingual texts. The most important of these are, W.A.I. IV, pl. 2, l. 4, 5 and 41, 42, *éneene*, **𐎶 𐎶 𐎶 𐎶** *šunu*,³ *zakiku muttašrābituti*⁴ *šunu*, "They, vapour wide-outreaching (are) they!"


¹ See W.A.I. II, p. 30, l. 40, where **𐎶** (so to be corrected) has, among other renderings, those of *aḫu* and *tappá* (from the Akkadian *tabba* "brother," "companion").

² See also W.A.I. II, pl. 23, l. 24, *cd.*



³ **𐎶 𐎶** plainly in both cases, and not **𐎶 𐎶 𐎶 𐎶** (W.A.I. IV, pl. 2, col. v, line 42).

⁴ Thus, *mut-taš (𐎶 𐎶)-ra-bi-tu-ti*, as W.A.I. IV, rightly gives, and not *mut-tar (𐎶 𐎶)-ra-bi-tu-ti*, as M. Lenormant corrects. "Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch.," Vol. VI, p. 174.

and K, 1284, l. 5, 6 
   *nam-tar D.P. edin-na lil-dim*
ni-gid-gid; Assyrian, *ša ina širim kima zakiki ittanašrabišu*,
 “(the pestilence) which like a vapour extends itself in
 the land.” (Études Accadiennes, II, 1, pp. 240, 241.)¹

3. *Nisutu*. From *nisû*, “to go afar.”  (Haupt).
6. *Idkamma*, 3rd pers. sing. masc. aorist Kal of *dakû*.
7. *Ukâ*, see Lotz, “Die Inschriften Tiglathpileser’s I,” p. 112.
8. *Ittakil*, 3rd pers. sing. masc. aorist Iphtéal of *takalu*.

¹ The text there published seems to have been restored from a rough transcript.

[NOTE.—The system of transliteration adopted here (the use of *š* for *s* () , *s* for *ś* () , and *k* for *q*), is that of the German school of Assyriology, and is much more convenient than the system in use in England. To this is added also the use of *ḫ* for *ḫ* or *kh* (*ḡ* for *ḫ*, *ḫ*, or *kh* in Akkadian and Sumerian), *ia* for *ya*, and *a'a* or *â* for *ai*, proposed by Dr. Paul Haupt (for the two last see his “Sumerischen Familiengesetze,” p. 63). Notes upon some of these alterations will be found in a future paper.]

