

SPECIMENS OF ASSYRIAN CORRESPONDENCE

BY THEO. G. PINCHES.

THERE is probably no branch of Assyro-Babylonian literature that is more attractive than the correspondence. Not only do the letters which have been found in the ancient record-offices of Assyria and Babylonia furnish the student with specimens of the modes of thought and expression of the ordinary people, and enable him to see in what consisted their communications, what were their intrigues, their joys, and their sorrows ; but they also furnish him with valuable sidelights upon the history, religion, manners, customs, and last, not least, important philological information—the peculiar idioms and pronunciation of different districts, the varieties of style of the different scribes.

The National Collection contains several hundred tablets bearing inscriptions of this class, addressed to and from various persons in different parts of the Assyrian empire, implying a very perfect system of communication between Nineveh, the capital, and the outlying districts. The subjects treated of vary from simple greetings to descriptions of hostile demonstra-

tions, congratulations, claims upon the royal clemency, answers to astrological, philological, and other questions, medical and other reports, proclamations, etc. etc. These letters are generally oblong tablets of baked clay, across which the lines of writing are inscribed the narrow way. It is not unlikely that many of the documents of this class which have come down to us are copies, the originals having been sent away from Nineveh. Papyrus was probably used for these documents, but clay letters were also sent about. These latter sometimes had an envelope of clay around them, addressed and sealed with the sender's cylinder.

The number of dated letters is very small in comparison with those without dates, so that we can only arrive at an idea as to when they were written by internal evidence, such as names, places, and historical events. The precise dates of many of them, however, must always remain uncertain.

These documents vary in length from one to six inches, and in width from three-quarters of an inch to about two inches and a half. The present texts are of sizes about midway between these two extremes.

NUMBER I

This text is a letter from Arad-Nanā, who seems to have been a physician, to the king of Assyria at the time, concerning a man, possibly an Assyrian prince and near relation of the king, who was ill. In-

deed, so ill was he, that the writer did not expect that he would live more than seven or eight days longer (see the last sentence of the translation). One ray of comfort only does the writer hold out, and that is, that the sufferer might recover, if the king would only cause prayer to be made to his gods.

Judging from the text, it is hardly likely that the sickness from which the man was suffering was a natural one. He had doubtless received a wound or injury—perhaps several—and it was very probable that one of these, which he had received in his head, would prove mortal.

The number of the tablet is S 1064.

TRANSLATION

To the king my lord, thy servant Arad-Nanā. May there be peace for ever and ever to the king my lord. May the god NINEP¹ and the goddess GULA give soundness of heart and soundness of flesh to the king my lord. Peace for ever.

To reduce the general inflammation of his forehead,² I have tied a bandage upon it. His face is swollen.³ Yesterday, as formerly, I opened the wound which had been received in the midst of it. As for the bandage which was over the swelling, matter was upon the bandage, the size of the tip of the little finger. Thy gods, if the whole of the flesh of his body they can restore unto him, cause thou to invoke, and his mouth will cry⁴: "Peace for ever. May the heart of the king my lord be good."

¹ [Or Uras.—*Ed.*]

² Literally "of the wall of his eyes."

³ Literally "In his face it rises," or "there is a rising."

⁴ Literal v "give."

He will live seven or eight days.¹

The text of which the translation is given above forms one of a number published by the Rev. S. A. Smith in his book *Die Keilschrifttexte Asurbanipals*, Heft II (the 17th plate), to which publication I contributed a German rendering, with philological notes.² The translation here given differs slightly from that which I published in S. A. Smith's *Keilschrifttexte*. The alterations are two in number, the first being in the eleventh line of the original, where, instead of reading *sa kuri êna-su*, "which is around his eyes," I now read *sa kutal êna-su*, "of the wall of his eyes," most likely meaning his "brows," or "forehead;"³ the other change is in the nineteenth and twentieth lines of the original text, where, instead of regarding *âtuli* as a verb, with the meaning of "I raised," "took off" ("I took off the bandage which was around it"), I now take it to be a noun with the meaning of "swelling." Though the sense of the whole is pretty clear, the translation will probably be still further improved as time goes on.

Other tablets of this class exist, and one of them,

¹ I give here a transcription of the original text for the use of students: "Ana sarri belia, arad-ka Arad-Nanâ. Lusulmu addannis addannis ana sarri belia ; Ninep u Gula dhub libbi, dhub sêre, ana sarri belia liddinu. Sulmu addannis. Ana lakû sigru khaniu sa kutal êna-su, tal'itam ina eli urtakis, ina appisu irtumu. Ina timali, ki badi, sirdhu sa ina libbi tsabituni aptadhar. Tallitam sa ina eli utuli, sarku ina eli tallite îbbassi, ammar qaqgadi ubanni tsikhirte. Ilani-ka, summa memeni sêre ida-su ina eli umedûni, sutamma pi-su ittidin : Sulmu addannis. Libbu sa sarri belia lu-dhâba. Adu ume sibittu samantu ibaladh."

² Afterwards published separately under the title *Zwei assyrische Briefe übersetzt und erklärt von Theo. G. Pinches* (Pfeiffer, Leipzig, 1887).

³ [*Kutalli* is shown by *Rm.*, 268.6, to signify "the brow."—*Ed.*]

K 519, is of great interest in connection with the text above translated. This other text is also from Arad-Nanā, and probably refers to the same sick man, who seems to have been the king's son. "Concerning the sick man," Arad-Nanā says, "from whose face blood flows, the Rab-mugi (Rab-mag?)¹ has said thus: 'Yesterday, as before, much (?) blood flowed.' He took off those bandages (*lippi ammute*) with care.² Upon the wounds (?) of his face it was inflamed (?). The injuries are improving. Before the blood³ flows, let him make the opening of the nostril⁴—the breath⁵ will come through, the blood will stop." A few more lines end the communication. This document, which is exceedingly interesting, is rather defaced here and there, thus greatly adding to the difficulties of a naturally difficult text. The important point about it is that, besides the interesting words that it contains, it gives the record of what may be called a surgical operation. Whether this communication preceded, in order of time, the text of which the full translation is given above, is doubtful; though, taking into consideration the hopeful tone of K 519, and the despairing tone of S 1064, the precedence of the former is exceedingly probable.

¹ [This is an important identification. For the Rab-mag see Jer. xxxix. 3.—*Ed.*]

² Or "skill" (*lamudanute*, from the root לָמַד. Cf. Heb. לָמוּד, "expert").

³ It must here be remarked, that the word "blood" (*dāmu*) is always used, as in Hebrew, in the plural. The phrase in the original is "before the bloods have flowed" (*ullu pani dāme utšūni*).

⁴ *Pî nakhîri liskumî*, literally "the mouth of the nostril may he make."

⁵ Literally "wind," *sāru*, a word which seems to mean also "spirit."

In the introduction it will be noticed that Ninep and Gula are invoked. The former, as a star, was sometimes named *Nin-azû*, "the lord physician." His more usual title, however, is "the warrior," and he is also named "lord of the weapon" (*bél kakki*), though the text which gives him this title invokes him to "remove the sickness."¹ The "warrior," able to cause wounds, was supposed to be able also to remove them. Gula, "the great lady," who is also called "the lady of Isin" or Karrag, was the consort of Ninep, especially under his name of Utu-gisgallu. Another of her names (like those already mentioned, Akkadian) is *Nin-tin-badaga*, "the lady giving life to the dead." Nebuchadnezzar speaks of her as the preserver and perfecter of his life (*edhirat, gamilat nabistia*). In another text, where she is named *Nin-Karrag* ("lady of Karrag"), she is spoken of as "the physician, high and great," and invoked to "take far away the grief of his (the sick man's) body." In this text her name occurs between Istar and Bau, who are apparently other forms of the same goddess.²

NUMBER 2

This is a letter containing a complaint to the king concerning some gold which seems to have been missing. The text is numbered K 538 in the National Collection.

¹ *Lissiz Nineb, bel kakki, linissi muttalliki*, "may Ninep, lord of the weapon, remain, may he remove the sickness."

² See Prof. A. H. Sayce's *Lectures upon the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians* (Hibbert Lectures for 1887), pp. 267, 268.

To the king my lord, thy servant Arad-Nabû. May there be peace to the king my lord ; may the gods ASSUR, SAMAS,¹ BEL, ZIRPANITUM,² NABÛ,³ TASMETUM,⁴ ISTAR of NINEVEH⁵ (and) ISTAR of ARBELA,⁶ these great gods, lovers of thy rule, let the king my lord live for a hundred years. May they satisfy the king my lord with old age and offspring.

The gold which, in the month Tisri, the *ittu*, the prefect of the palace, and I with them, missed—2 talents of standard gold (and) 6 talents of gold not standard—(this gold) the hands of the *rab-danibe*⁷ placed in the house, he sealed it up, (and) the gold for the image of the kings⁸ and for the image of the king's mother he gave not. Let the king my lord give command to the *ittu* (and) the prefect of the palace, that they may discover the gold. The beginning of the month is good.⁹ Let them give it to the men. Let them do the work.¹⁰

A translation of this interesting text was contributed by me to the first series of the *Records of the Past*,¹⁰ eleven years ago. Since that time the text itself, with a translation, has been published by the Rev. S. A. Smith in his *Keilschrifttexte Assurbanipals* (Heft II, plate 7, and pp. 30-33); and I also con-

¹ The Sun-god.

² The consort of Bel-Merodâch, also given as Zir-banitung, "seed creatress."

³ Nebo, "the teacher."

⁴ "She who hears," Nebo's consort.

⁵ Goddess of love.

⁶ Goddess of war.

⁷ Apparently this word means "chief of the metal-workers."

⁸ Or, "for the image of our king."

⁹ Apparently "good to begin the work."

¹⁰ The following is a transcription of the original text : " Ana sarri belia, arad-ka Arad-Nabû. Lûsalimu ana sarri belia. Assur, Samas, Bel, Zirpanitung, Nabû, Tasmatum, Istar sa Ninua, Istar sa Arba'-ili, ilani annuti rabuti, raimuti sarruti-ka, estin mê sanati ana sarri belia luballidhu ; sibutu littutu, ana sarri belia lusabbu khuratsu sa ina arakh Tisriti ittu aba-êgala û anaku issi-sunu nikhidhûni, salsu bilti khuratsu sakru, sissu bilti la sakru ina biti qata sa rabdanibe issakna, iktanak ; khuratsu ana tsalam sarrani, ana tsalam sa ummi sarri lâ iddin. Sarru bêli ana itti ana aba-êgala dhêmmi liskun, khuratsu liptiu. Res arkhi dhabûni. Ana ummâni liddinu. Dullu lipusu."

¹¹ Vol. xi. pp. 75, 76.

tributed to the same work (p. 86), a "free" translation in English, which does not essentially differ from that given above. These translations are much better than that which I gave at first, the improvements being due to the advances which have been made in the science of Assyriology since that was published.

The principal difference in the translation occurs in the second part, this difference being caused by translating the word *nikhidhuni* by "we missed," instead of "sinned" or "transgressed." It is unlikely that a man would voluntarily accuse himself of being a thief, hence this rendering. The meaning of "to miss," however, attached to this root, occurs in Hebrew, Job v. 24, "thou shalt visit thy fold and shalt miss nothing,"¹ so that the meaning here proposed for the word may be regarded as quite certain.

Another text referring to the making of images will be found in S. A. Smith's *Keilschrifttexte Assurbanipals*, Heft III, plates 12-13, and pp. 39-43.

NUMBER 3

The third text which I give is a translation of a very interesting letter or proclamation, apparently written by Assur-bani-apli, or Assurbanipal, to the Babylonians, whilst they were subject to Assyria. After the usual royal greeting, the king speaks of

¹ Revised version. See also Tregelles' (Bagster and Sons), and Mühlau and Volck's *Gesenius*, under נִחַד .

some rumour which had reached him, anent certain seditious words uttered by a man whom he does not name, but whom he speaks of as "the wind" (*sáru*), and farther on as "the lord of slander" (*bel-dababi*).¹ Apparently the Assyrian king wished it to be thought that he considered this man's exhortations as simply "vain, empty words," and the man himself as beneath his notice; but the letter itself indicates that he really thought both the man and his message to be of sufficient importance to counteract if he could. He therefore exhorts the Babylonians, in fairly vigorous terms, to pay no attention to "the lord of slander," and he warns them that they are responsible for the payment of the tribute due to Assyria, which they seemed inclined to pervert to the use of the enemy of the Assyrian king, or at least to raise as much for his use until they could, with his help, throw off the Assyrian yoke. Hence the king's anger, and his impatience for a reply to his exhortation. The text is made the more interesting by the fact that it not only gives the name of the eponym during whose term of office it was written, but the name of the person by whom it was sent as well. The number of the text is K 84.

TRANSLATION

The will of the king to the BABYLONIANS.—Peace from me to your heart; may there be good to you. The words

¹ It is not unlikely that this person was a certain Nabû-bel-sumâti, a descendant of Merodach-baladan, who took part in a revolt against Assurbani-pal. (See Geo. Smith's *History of Assurbani-pal*, pp. 200-204.)

which the wind for the third time now has spoken to you, all come (to me). I have heard them. Ye cannot govern the wind. By the heart of ASSUR and MERODACH, my gods, I swear that all the evil words, which it has spoken against me, I am treasuring up in my heart, and I have spoken them with my mouth. But artful is he—he has been artful. Thus the name of the BABYLONIANS itself is indeed evil unto me, and I do not listen to it. Your brotherhood, which is with the ASSYRIANS,¹ and your privileges, which I had confirmed, I have established; more than that there is—ye are near to my heart.² I command also, that ye listen not to his sedition. Do not make your name, which is before me,³ and before all the world, evil; and commit not, yourselves, a sin against God.

And the equivalence of the word, which ye are treasuring up in your hearts, I know. It is this: "We will ignore the tax, it is turned into our tribute." That is no tribute; it is not that ye have equalised to my slanderer⁴ the matter⁵ of "corban and tax," it is that the payment of tribute⁶ lies with yourselves, and failure⁷ concerning the agreement is before God. Therefore now I send to you, that by these words ye may not join yourselves with him. Let me quickly see the answer to my letter. The bond which I have made with BEL, the service of MERODACH—this shall not be destroyed by my hands.

Month Iyyar, 23d day, eponymy of Assur-dûra-utsur. Samas-baladh'su-iqbi has brought it.⁸

¹ Literally "The sons of Assyria." ² "Ye (are) with my heart."

³ Literally "which has been made before me."

⁴ Literally "lord of slander."

⁵ Literally "name."

⁶ Literally "the making of the tribute." ⁷ Or, "a sin."

⁸ The following is a transcription of the original text: "Abat sarri ana Bâbilaa. Salimu aasi libba-kunu; lû-dhâbu kunusi. Dibbi sa sâri salasis agâ idbubakkunusi, gabbu ittibbûni alteme-sunu. Sâru la takipa-su. Ina lib Assur, Marduk, ilania attama kî dibbi bi'sûte mala ina mukkhîa idbubu, ina libbâ kutstsupaku, û ina pîa aqbû. Alla niklu sù, ittikil umma sumu sa Bâbilaa raimani-su ittîa lu-bais, û anaku ul asimme-sî. Akhut-kunu sa itti mârâni mât Assur u kitinnuta-kunu, sa aktsuru, addi. Eli sa enna sù—itti libbâ attunu. Abbittimma saratê-su la tasimmâ. Sun-kunu, sa ina pania u ina pan matâti gabbu banû, la tuba'asa, û ramau-kunu ina pan ili la tukhadhdhâ. U sazatu amat sa itti libbi-kunu kutstsupakunu, anaku idi, umma ennâ: Assâ nittekirus, ana bilti-ni itara.

There are several similar proclamations to this, but probably none of them are in such a perfect state of preservation, though most of them are more interesting, because they give more precise historical indications by mentioning the names of the persons to whom they refer.

The text itself contains several interesting linguistic peculiarities. In addition to the expressions already noted, the following may prove to be of interest to the student: *raimani-su*, "his own," for *ramani-su*—probably pointing to a peculiarity of pronunciation;¹ *sun-kunu* for *sumkunu*, "your name" (change of *m* into *n* before *k*—not uncommon in Assyrian); *kutstsupakunu* for *kutstsupatunu*, "ye are treasuring up"—a most important variant form; the interesting phrases *yânu sî kî . . .* "it is not that . . .", and *sî kî . . .* "it is that . . ."; and the use of the demonstratives *âgâ* and *âganute*.

It is noteworthy, also, that in two passages the king speaks of God (*Ilu*), not of "the gods" (*il raman-kunu, ina pan Ili la tukhadhdha*, "and commit not, yourselves, a sin before God"; *u khadhdhu ina lib ade ina pan Ili*, "and a sin concerning the agreement is before God"), as if, at the time he was writing

Ul biltu sî. Yânu sî kî sumu kurbanû u assa itti bel-dababia tatasizza; sî kî sakan bilte ina eli rameni-kunu u khadhdhû ina lib adê ina pan ili. Enna adû altaprakkunusi, kî ina dibbi aganute itti-su raman-kunu la tudanipa. Khandhis gabri sipirtia lumur. Kitsru sa ana Bêl aktsur, sikipti Marduk—agâ ina qata-ya la ikhibbil.

"Arkhu Aaru, umu esrâ-salsu, limmu Assur-dûra-utsur. Samas-baladh'su-iqbi ittubil."

¹ In other passages of the text where the word occurs, it has the regular forms, *raman kunu* and *rameni-kunu*, "yourselves." The latter is an oblique case with vowel harmony.

these words, the One-God idea was uppermost in his mind. This was, probably, the result of a feeling inherited from the time when monotheism, more or less pure, was the possession of the Semitic race, or at least that portion of it to which the Semitic Babylonians or Assyrians and the Israelites belonged.¹

The text is published in the 4th vol. of the *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, plate 52 of the old edition, plate 47 of the new. The colophon, accompanied by a translation, was published by G. Smith in his *History of Assurbanipal*, p. 181. The date of this interesting document is about 650 B.C.

¹ This question, which admits of a much fuller treatment and discussion than can be given to it here, is intimately bound up with the original significance and use of the divine names Jah and Jahveh (Jehovah).

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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