

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN PALESTINE  
AND EGYPT IN THE FIFTEENTH  
CENTURY B.C.

TRANSLATED BY THE EDITOR

THE authorities of the Royal Museum of Berlin have laid scholars under an obligation by their speedy publication of all the cuneiform tablets found in the ruins of Tel el-Amarna which are now at Berlin. Their action contrasts favourably with that of our own British Museum, which has for three years withheld the tablets in its possession even from the sight of students. The three parts of the *Mittheilungen aus der orientalischen Sammlungen*, in which the tablets are published, together form a work worthy of the Museum that has issued it. Drs. Winckler and Abel, to whom the copying and editing of the texts have been entrusted, have performed their task with marvellous accuracy and skill, which can be fully appreciated only by those who have themselves attempted to copy the extremely difficult inscriptions of Tel el-Amarna. The new and complicated forms of the characters and the injuries undergone by many of the tablets make the work of a copyist

peculiarly hard. To the texts now at Berlin Dr. Winckler has added those copied by him in the Cairo Museum, as well as a few others belonging to M. Golénischeff, Prof. Maspero, and the Rev. Ch. Murch. When those belonging to the British Museum are also given to the public, all that remains of the Tel el-Amarna collection will be in the hands of philologists and historians; until they are published our knowledge of the collection will not only be incomplete, but doubtless at times misleading.

The translations which follow are those of letters from Palestine, more especially Southern Palestine, which are all contained in the third part of the *Mittheilungen aus der orientalischen Sammlungen* (Berlin, Spemann, 1890). They must be received with the indulgence due to the first translations of ancient texts. The language of the letters is full of forms and expressions which are new to the Assyriologist; the large number of tablets, however, which we can compare with one another, has thrown light upon many of these, and explained words and idioms which would otherwise have been obscure. Some of the texts have been translated by M. Delattre in the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, Dec. 1890, March and April 1891.

Most of the letters which I have translated, if not all of them, seem to have been written towards the close of the reign of Amenôphis IV., "the Heretic King," when the Egyptian empire which had been built up by the great monarchs of the Eighteenth

Dynasty was beginning to fall to pieces. One group of them, of which the letter of the Governor of Bashan (No. xxiii) is an example, relates to a general levy of the governors and vassal princes of Palestine and Syria. Some common danger threatened the empire, and the subject states of Asia were called upon to hold themselves ready to join the household troops of Egypt with their own forces. Other letters show that all parts of Palestine were in that disturbed condition which usually precedes the fall of the central authority. Enemies were attacking it from without, and the petty princes were fighting among themselves within. The tributary priest-king of Jerusalem charges Malchiel and Su-yardata with robbing him of a portion of his territory ; Su-yardata retaliates by bringing a counter-accusation against him. Complaints are lodged against a certain Lab'ai, the seat of whose government was in Mount Ephraim, from whence he intrigued against Megiddo in the north and Gezer and Jerusalem in the south ; and Lab'ai sends an abject letter to the Egyptian king in order to prove his innocence.

The correspondence shows that Canaan was in much the same political condition as India is at present under British rule. Many of the cities were under Egyptian governors, but in other cases the native prince had been allowed to retain his title and a certain amount of power. He was, however, required to pay tribute, to admit an Egyptian garrison within the walls of his city, and to receive from

time to time the visits of a specially appointed Commissioner, who bore the title of "Gate-keeper," and corresponded to the "Resident" of a protected state in India. At times a governor existed by the side of the native king, whose power, therefore, must have been merely nominal. Such was the case, for example, at Sidon (Nos. xvi, xvii). Even where it was not the case, the territory of the capital city was called "the country of the King" of Egypt, and Egyptian *khazanute*, or "governors," were imposed upon the towns within it. The authority of the native king, moreover, depended on the pleasure of the Egyptian sovereign. Ebed-tob of Jerusalem boasts that, unlike other princes in the province, he alone derived his royal office from the oracle of a god.

The letter of the Governor of Ziri-Basani ("the plateau of Bashan") proves that Mr. Tomkins was right in holding that the list of the conquered towns of Canaan given by Thothmes III. at Karnak included the eastern side of the Jordan. The mention of the city of Zaphon (see No. xiii, note on line 4) points in the same direction.

The Egyptian troops in Palestine consisted of the *tsabi matsarti*, or "soldiers of the garrison," who were stationed in the subject cities, and of the *tsabi bitâte*, "the soldiers of the palace," or household troops, who answered to our Guards, and were attached to the person of the Egyptian governor. Besides these there were the *tsabi saruti*, "the soldiers

of the kingdom," who seem to have been foreign auxiliaries; and at times also the *amili khabbati*, "the plunderers," or Beduin, who were in the pay of the Egyptian government. The vassal princes were required to furnish soldiers, horses, and chariots when ordered to do so; in times of necessity, however, it was to Egypt that the representatives of the "Great King" appealed for military help.

In the period to which the correspondence belongs Syria and the north of Palestine, at all events in the neighbourhood of Sidon and Tyre, were threatened by the Hittites; while Central Palestine, from Hazor to Gezer, was exposed to the attacks of the Khabbati, or "plunderers." These can hardly be any other than the Beduin, who still infest the plain of Sharon, and were called Shasu, or "plunderers," by the Egyptians. Southern Palestine, the eastern portion of which constituted the territory of Uru'salim or Jerusalem, was in danger from the Khabiri, whose name occurs frequently in the letters of Ebed-tob. From one of these (No. i, line 36) it would appear that their leader was Elimelech. Jerusalem and the district which depended on it were so seriously menaced by them as to make Ebed-tob declare again and again that if assistance were not at once sent to him the province would be lost to Egypt. There is no record that an answer was returned to these urgent requests, and it therefore seems probable that the letters of Ebed-tob were among the last which Amenôphis IV. received. If so, and if the Egyptian

king died shortly afterwards, we may feel certain that no succours were despatched to the hard-pressed province. The death of Amenôphis IV. was the signal for the outbreak of civil and religious war and the withdrawal of the Egyptian garrisons from Asia. The Khabiri would have been permitted to continue their victorious career, and, it may be, to capture the strong fortress of Jerusalem itself.

The name of the Khabiri has been identified with that of the Hebrews ; but the political circumstances presupposed by the letters of Ebed-tob do not agree with those which accompanied the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan. Moreover, the word Khabiri is Assyrian, and signifies "confederates," from the same root as that which has given Heber, "the confederate," and Hebron, "the confederacy," in Hebrew. It corresponds to the name of the Kabyles in Algeria, Kabyle being the Arabic Jabail, or "confederates." Now it is a curious fact that Ebed-tob nowhere makes any allusion to the famous sanctuary of Hebron, although his letters show that his territory extended westward to Rabbah and Keilah, and southward to Carmel, and that consequently Hebron ought to have been included within it. The most probable explanation of the fact is that the sanctuary was in the hands of others. We know from the Old Testament that the original name of the city in which the sanctuary stood was Kirjath-Arba, while the name of Hebron, "the confederacy," must have been given to it in con-

sequence of its having been a meeting-place of certain confederated tribes. Who these tribes were we learn from the Biblical records. They were Hittites and Amorites, with a sprinkling of the older Canaanitish population of the land.

In these confederated tribes, therefore, the later representatives of the confederacy of which we read in Gen. xiv. 13, I see the Khabiri of the Tel el-Amarna tablets. Their centre was the great sanctuary of Kirjath-Arba, and it was from behind its fortified walls that they sallied forth to attack the officers of the Egyptian king. Ebed-tob's despairing cries for help show us how formidable they had become. That my view of their character is correct, and that the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops from Palestine enabled them to conquer both Jerusalem and its territory, is indicated by a passage in the book of Ezekiel (xvi. 2, 45). Here we read of Jerusalem that her "father was an Amorite and" her "mother an Hittite." The letters of Ebed-tob, whose name is Canaanite, and who uses Canaanite words, like *anuki*, "I," lead us to infer that it was not until after his time that the Amorite and Hittite possessed themselves of the place. When the Israelites entered Canaan a century after the age of Ebed-tob they found Jerusalem a stronghold of the Jebusite tribe of Amorites. It had ceased for a while to be Jerusalem, and had become Jebus, the "Jebusite" city.

The despatches of Ebed-tob tell us for the first

time how ancient the name of Jerusalem was, and also what was its meaning. It was the seat of the worship and oracle of the god 'Salim, whose temple stood on "the mountain" of Moriah. An Assyrian tablet (*W. A. I.*, ii. 2, 393; iii. 70, 100) informs us that the word *uru* was the equivalent of the Assyrian *alu*, "city," and since the name of Jerusalem is written Uru-'salim in cuneiform, it is evident that it must signify "the city of the god 'Salim." 'Salim is the Hebrew *shâlôm*, and denoted the "god of Peace." The deity, therefore, under whose protection Jerusalem grew up was one in whose temple feuds and rivalries were laid aside, and the neighbouring peoples met in unity and peace. As Ebed-tob informs us, the king of Jerusalem was appointed by an oracle of the god, and was thus a priest rather than a king. In Assyria the priests of the god Assur preceded the kings of the city of Assur; and Dr. Glaser has lately shown that the same was also the case in Southern Arabia, in the kingdom of Saba. But whereas in Assyria and Saba the priests eventually became kings, this did not happen in Jerusalem, where the ruler remained royal priest or priest-king, down to the time, at any rate, of Ebed-tob. He was priest of 'Salim rather than king of Uru-'Salim.

An unexpected light is thus thrown on the person and position of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is called king of Salem instead of Jerusalem; the reason is now obvious. He was priest of El Elyôn, "the Most High God," and king only in virtue of his



priestly office. It is also now clear why the father of Melchizedek is not named. Ebed-tob states that his authority was not based on the right of inheritance; he had been called to exercise it by a divine voice. The state over which he presided was in reality a theocracy.

The letters of Ebed-tob further show why it was that Melchizedek went forth to bless Abram in the name of his god after the defeat of the Babylonian army. His god was 'Salim, the god of Peace; Abram's victory had delivered Palestine from the invader and restored it again to peace. On the other hand, the sacred character of the priest-king of Jerusalem must have been acknowledged throughout the neighbouring district, and to him accordingly the victorious Hebrew paid the customary tithes.

The oracle of the god 'Salim quoted by Ebed-tob is interesting upon two accounts. On the one hand it shows that the Jewish prophets were not the first to extend the range of their prophetic vision to foreign nations. In so far as the people of Babylonia and Aram-Naharaim had an influence upon Canaanitish politics, their future fortunes were a matter of concern to the Canaanitish deity. On the other hand, the oracle proves that Babylonian conquest had made itself felt as far as Southern Palestine. Incidentally, therefore, the historical character of Chedorlaomer's campaign is thus indicated, as well as the tradition recorded by the Egyptian historian Manetho, that the Hyksos, after their expulsion from

Egypt, fortified Jerusalem against the Assyrians, as the Babylonians were called by the Greeks. The fact that the oracle also mentions Nahrima or Aram-Naharaim supports the account of the oppression of Israel by the king of that country shortly after the Israelitish occupation of Canaan. It shows that the conquests of Naharaim had already threatened that part of Palestine in which Judah afterwards established itself.

The name of Melchizedek is curiously illustrated by a passage in one of the tablets (No. vi, line 32). Ebed-tob here employs the Canaanite word *tsaduq*, "just," which does not occur in Assyrian, the latter language having substituted the root *esiru* for *tsadaq*. Since Sydyk was a Phœnician divinity, it is possible that the god of Jerusalem was worshipped under the title of Tsedeq, or "Righteousness"; so that the names of the two kings of Jerusalem mentioned in the Old Testament would have meant "Tsedeq is king," "Tsedeq is lord."

However this may be, the light thrown by the letters of Ebed-tob on Melchizedek's title of "king of Salem" casts further light on the title applied by Isaiah (ix. 6) to the coming Saviour, the "Prince of Peace." Isaiah was a student of the history of his city and country, and elsewhere he shows himself acquainted with its past records. *Sar shalom*, "the Prince of Peace," is, word for word, the Assyrian *sar 'Salim*, or "King of Salem." The correspondence cannot be an accidental one; the Saviour who

should restore Judah would not only bring peace with him, but would also be, in a higher and more spiritual sense, the successor of Melchizedek. It may be that the title of "the Mighty God" is a reference to the old title of the god of Jerusalem as "the mighty king."

The Egyptian monarch is frequently addressed as "my gods" in the plural. He not only represented the divine hierarchy, but he was also in a measure its incarnation. But the title is not, like that of "Sun-god," of Egyptian origin. It must therefore be Canaanite, and is of interest as pointing to the Canaanite origin of the use in Hebrew of the plural *Elohim*, "gods," in a singular sense. The language of the Israelites had thus prepared them for applying to their God a plural noun. He was "God of gods," and in Him all their attributes and essences were comprehended.

The letters from Palestine establish the fact that reading and writing were widely known and practised in the country at the close of the fifteenth century before our era. But the writing was that of Babylonia, thus proving the deep impression which had been made by Babylonian culture upon Western Asia. It is difficult to account for the impression except upon the hypothesis of Babylonian conquest. The hypothesis is confirmed by the number of places in Palestine which took their names from Babylonian deities. Rimmon, the Babylonian Ramman, Anah and Anath, the Babylonian Anu and Anat, Nebo,

and even Sin—are all found in Palestine or the countries immediately adjoining. How easy was their introduction is shown by the letter of Ebed-tob, in which he identifies the god of Jerusalem with the Babylonian Uras. Uras was the form of the Sun-god who was specially worshipped at Nipur, and his identification with 'Salim proves that the latter also was regarded as possessing a solar character.

*P.S.*—Since these translations were in type, Dr. Zimmern has been kind enough to send me an advance-sheet of a paper entitled “Die Keilschrift-briefe aus Jerusalem,” to be published in the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, in which he has translated, with transcription and notes, the letters of Ebed-tob, numbered 102, 103, 104, 105, and 106, in the edition of Drs. Winckler and Abel. He has also collated the published text with the originals. References to Dr. Zimmern's paper will be found in my notes.

## CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND EGYPT IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY B.C.

### I.—THE LETTERS OF THE GOVERNOR OF JERUSALEM TO THE EGYPTIAN KING

#### I. (No. 102)<sup>1</sup>

1. To the king my lord speak
2. thus: (I) Ebed-tob<sup>2</sup> thy servant,
3. at the feet of my lord the king,
4. seven times seven prostrate myself.
5. What have I done<sup>3</sup> against the king my lord?
6. They have slandered myself, laying wait for (me)
7. in the presence of the king, the lord, saying: Ebed-tob
8. has revolted from the king his lord.
9. Behold, neither my father
10. nor my mother have exalted me
11. in this place;
12. the prophecy of the mighty king<sup>4</sup>
13. has caused me to enter the house of my father.
14. Why should I have committed
15. a sin against the king the lord?
16. With the king my lord (is) life.

<sup>1</sup> The numbers in parentheses are those of the *Mittheilungen aus der Orientalischen Sammlungen*, Part III.

<sup>2</sup> Abdu-dhabba. The writer has misread the first character of the word, DHAB-ba, which has the phonetic value of *khi*, and has substituted for it a character which has the value of *khe*.

<sup>3</sup> Zimmern has acutely explained *ipsati* as a first person singular.

<sup>4</sup> *Issuppu*, "a prophecy," from the same root as *asipu*, "a prophet." The "mighty king" will be the god 'Salim, whose sanctuary stood on Mount Moriah. Dr. Zimmern's earlier reading of "prophecy" is preferable to his present reading "arm" (*suru'u*).

17. I say to the Commissioner<sup>1</sup> of the king [my] lord :  
 18. Why dost thou love  
 19. the Confederates,<sup>2</sup> and the governors  
 20. thou hatest? and constantly  
 21. I am sending to the presence of the king my lord  
 22. to say (that) the countries of the king my lord  
 23. are being destroyed. Constantly  
 24. I am sending to the king my lord,  
 25. and let the king my lord consider,  
 26. since the king my lord has established  
 27. the guard<sup>3</sup> who have taken  
 28. the fortresses. [Let] Yikhhbil-Khamu<sup>4</sup> [be sent].

(The next four lines are lost)

33. . . . the guard.  
 34. May the king send help<sup>5</sup> to his country.  
 35. [May he send troops] to his country which protects  
 36. [the fort]resses of the king the lord, all of them,  
     since Elimelech<sup>6</sup>  
 37. is destroying all the country of the king,  
 38. and may the king the lord send help to his country.  
 39. I say : I have gone down  
 40. along with the king my lord, and I have not seen  
 41. the tears of the king my lord ; but hostility  
 42. is strong against me, yet I have not taken  
 43. anything whatever<sup>7</sup> from the king my lord ;  
 44. and may the king incline towards my face ;  
 45. may he despatch<sup>8</sup> the guard [to me],  
 46. and may he appoint a Commissioner,<sup>9</sup> and I shall not  
     see the tear[s]  
 47. of the king my lord, since the king [my] lord  
 48. shall live when the Commissioner has departed.  
 49. I say : the countries of the king [my lord] are being  
     destroyed ;

<sup>1</sup> Assyrian *rabitsu*. In one of the letters (129, 21) it is explained by *khasani*, "governor."

<sup>2</sup> *Khabiri*, or "Hebronites."

<sup>3</sup> Literally "men of the guard."

<sup>4</sup> See 105, *rev.*, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> [*Li's*]ken, the Heb. 'sákan. <sup>6</sup> Ili-milku.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Zimmern reads: "I have not been able to go down (*eraba*)."

<sup>8</sup> Or "leave."

<sup>9</sup> *Likup*, whence *gipu*, "a Commissioner."

50. (yet) thou dost not listen to me.  
 51. All the governors are destroyed ;  
 52. no governor remains to the king the lord.  
 53. May the king turn his face to the men,  
 54. and may he send auxiliaries,<sup>1</sup> even the troops  
 55. of the king my lord. No countries remain unto the king :  
 56. the Confederates have wasted all the countries of the  
 king.  
 57. If auxiliaries come  
 58. this year, the countries of the king the lord will be pre-  
 served ;<sup>2</sup>  
 59. but if no auxiliaries come  
 60. the countries of the king my lord are destroyed.  
 61. [To] the secretary of the king my lord Ebed-tob  
 [speaks]  
 62. [thus : a] report<sup>3</sup> of (my) words  
 63. thou layest<sup>4</sup> before the king my lord : there are de-  
 stroyed  
 64. [by] the enemy the countries of the king my lord.

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 II. (No. 104)

1. To the king my lord, [my] Sun-god [speak]
2. thus : (I) Ebed-tob thy servant
3. at the feet of the king my lord seven times
4. seven prostrate myself.
5. Behold : the king my lord has established
6. his name at the rising of the sun
7. and the setting of the sun. Slanders
8. they have uttered against me.
9. Behold : I (am) not a governor,
10. a *vassal* (?), to the king my lord.
11. Behold : I (am) the ally<sup>5</sup> of the king,
12. and I have paid the tribute of the king, even I.
13. Neither my father nor

<sup>1</sup> *Tsabi idati*,

<sup>2</sup> Literally, "if there are troops this year, the countries of the king the lord exist."

<sup>3</sup> Literally "a causing to enter," [*se*]rib.

<sup>4</sup> Literally "thou recountest."

<sup>5</sup> *Rukhi*, Heb. רֶשֶׁא.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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