

THE ORACLE OF ISTAR OF ARBELA

TRANSLATED BY THEO. G. PINCHES

AT the beginning of Esarhaddon's reign, he warred, as shown by his annals, in a district called Khani-galbat, on the Upper Euphrates. As the record is mutilated, it is not known against whom he fought, but it is generally supposed that it was against the troops of his two brothers, Adrammelech (Assur-munik or Assur-mulik) and Sharezer, who, after having slain their father, had escaped into Armenia, and now came (as is conjectured) to dispossess their younger brother of the throne of Assyria, on which, during their absence, the people had seated him. At this time, evidently to encourage the young king in his difficult task of winning to himself and consolidating the kingdom, the following addresses, purporting to be the utterances of his favourite goddess, Istar of Arbela, Goddess of War, by the mouths of the various people whose names are attached to them, were sent to him. Esarhaddon describes the success which attended his arms as follows :—

*Pulukhti ilani rabûti bêli-ia r'skhuṣ-sunutima
tib takhazi-ia danni emuru-ma emû makkkhur.
Istar bêlit qabli takhazi ra'imat sanguti-ia
idâa taziz-ma midpanat'sunu tasbir ;
takhaza-sunu raksu tapdkhur-ma
ina pukhri-sunu iqbû umma : Annû sarani.¹*

“The fear of the great gods, my lords, overwhelmed them,
and
they saw the onrush of my powerful attack, and inclined
to retreat.
Istar, lady of war (and) battle, lover of my priesthood,
stood by my side, and broke their bows ;
she opened out their close battle(-formation), and
in their assembly they cried out thus: ‘This is our king.’”

Judging from this, Adrammelech and Sharezer must have fled with a considerable force of Assyrian soldiers, who, when they saw the battle going against them, at once acknowledged Esarhaddon's claim. Esarhaddon's reverence for Istar of Arbela, Goddess of Battle, is borne witness to from the fact that he gives her the principal honour of the defeat of his enemies,—really due, however (judging from Esarhaddon's words), to an error in generalship, namely, an open instead of a close formation.

A translation of the Oracle was given by me in the first series of the *Records of the Past*, vol. xi., thirteen years ago. The text has since then been thoroughly revised, and is now published in the 4th vol. of the *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, pl. 61 in the new edition and 68 in the old. Partly

¹ *W. A. I.*, iii. pl. 15, col. i., lines 20-25.

in consequence of this revision, and partly in consequence of the advance made in the translation of Assyrian texts, the rendering here given is much improved. The Rev. A. Delattre, S.J., has also translated and commented on the greater part of the inscription.

With regard to the text itself, it is to be noted that it is written on a large clay tablet, of which about two-thirds are preserved, the lost portion being the upper part of the obverse and the lower part of the reverse. There are three columns on each side. Each of the eight pronouncements of the oracle is followed by a ruled line, after which comes the name of the person by whom it was uttered. A second ruled line follows, and then comes the text of the next utterance of the oracle. The first and the last utterances are by men, the others by women, probably priests and priestesses or votaries of Istar. Five of the oracle-utterers (three women and two men) are of the city of Arbela; one, a woman, is of the city Darâkhûya,¹ "in the mountains"; another, also a woman, is of the city of Assur; and a third is conjectured by the Rev. A. Delattre to be a slave of the king.² The language of each utterance is very similar, notwithstanding that the text was composed by eight different persons. It probably contains archaisms

¹ Or Dâra-âkhû-ya, a name meaning, according to its form (but perhaps only a folk-etymology), "(May) my brother live long."

² See p. 139, note.

and poetic words or phrases, though it shows also many of the peculiarities of the despatch and letter-style.

The only unmistakable reference to a warlike expedition is the mention of the crossing of the river, in Column IV.¹ With the usual obscurity of oracle-utterances, however, the name of the river is not given. The first utterance, on the other hand, is, perhaps, a little better, for in lines 19-21² we have the following sentence:—

*Anaku Istar sa Arba'îlu,
Nakarûte-ka, ukâa,
adana-ka.*

“I am Istar of Arbela—,
thine enemies, the *ukâa*
I will give to thee.”

Now, although there is no determinative prefix before *ukâa*, showing it to be the name of a country (or people), we may nevertheless take it as being such, and as indicating the nation or tribe called the *Ukâa* or *Ukkâa*, a people against whom Sargon and Sennacherib fought, and who seem to have inhabited a part of Armenia. It is also noteworthy that the oracle containing this reference is placed first. The omission of the determinative prefix may be regarded as not altogether unintentional, for had Esarhaddon been unsuccessful in Armenia, the oracle-utterer would have defended himself by saying that the word in question was not the name of the well-

¹ See p. 137. The Tigris is probably intended.

² Page 134.

known nation of the Ukâa, but something entirely different. Fortunately, though, for Esarhaddon (and also, probably, for Istar-lâ-tasiat), he was more fortunate than Crœsus and Pyrrhus.

The Pythia Mimma-âbi-sa is not improbably the same as the woman of that name mentioned in one of Sennacherib's letters to his father Sargon,¹ referring to the situation at that time among the Ukkâa and Armenia in general.

¹ See the New York *Independent* for August 22, 1889, p. 15.

THE ORACLE OF ISTAR OF ARBELA

COLUMN I

1. strong
2. vast
3. his strong . .
4.
5. . . . [Esarh]addon king of countries
6. fear [not],
7. the lord, the spirit¹ who speaks to thee
8. I speak to him, I have not concealed (it).
9. Thine enemies
10. like the rains (or floods) of Sivan
11. before thy feet are constantly running away.
12. The great lady am I
13. I am ISTAR of ARBELA
14. who thine enemies
15. before thy feet have put to flight.²
16. Where are my words
17. which I speak to thee?
18. Thou hast not relied upon (them).
19. I am ISTAR of ARBELA,
20. Thine enemies, the UKKIANS
21. I give to thee. I am
22. ISTAR of ARBELA,
23. in thy van, (and)
24. by thy side
25. I go. Fear not.
26. Thou art in the midst of the officers.³
27. I am in the midst of my host.
28. I advance, I rest.

¹ Literally "the wind."

² Literally "turned."

³ Or, "princes," (*mugi*; see vol. ii. p. 182, line 6, and footnote).

29. From the mouth of Istar-lâ-tasîat
30. a son of ARBELA.
-

31. King of ASSYRIA, fear not!
32. The enemy of ASSYRIA
33. as a sacrifice I give.
34. Thy heroism,
35. thy . . . ,
36. thy . . .
37. The great [lady] am I
38. [I am ISTAR of] ARBELA
39. his heart
40. his . .

COLUMN II

1.
2.
3. I have not heard . . .
4. with the bolt . . .
5. with the . . .
6. the enemy afterwards . . .
7. I do not . . .
8. I have trusted to thee—rest (?) not
-

9. From the mouth of Sinqi-sa-âmur,
10. a daughter of ARBELA.
-

11. I have been exalted (?) by Esarhaddon
12. my exalted (?) king (of) ARBELA.
-

13. From the mouth of Rêmute-allate,
14. of the city DARÂKHÛYA¹
15. which is within the mountains.
-

¹ Or Dâra-akhû-ya.

-
16. Fear not, Esarhaddon,
 17. I, BEL, with thee
 18. will speak.
 19. The beams of thy heart
 20. will I guard¹—like to thy mother
 21. thou hast caused me to have pain.
 22. Sixty great gods with me
 23. are joined—they will guard thee—
 24. the Moongod on thy right, the Sungod on thy left,
 25. the sixty great gods around thee
 26. stand—they have made the centre of the stronghold
 firm.
 27. Upon mankind trust not,²
 28. turn thine eyes
 29. to me, look on me.
 30. I am ISTAR of ARBELA,
 31. ASSUR is pleased (?) with thee
 32. I will strengthen (?) thy youth.
 33. Fear not. Glorify me.
 34. Is not the enemy submissive
 35. who has given (tribute) to thee?
 36. I have spoken:
 37. let the later things be as the earlier.
 38. I am NEBO, lord of the making of tablets,
 39. glorify me.
-
40. From the mouth of Bayâ, a child of the city of ARBELA.
-

COLUMN III

(Many lines lost)

10. I
 11. I turn (?)
 12. I am the god
-

¹ Apparently meaning, "I will give thee courage."

² Compare Psalm cxlvi. 3, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man." See also Psalm cxviii. 8.

13. From the mouth of Sâ-* [a daughter]
 14. of the city of ASSUR.

15. I am ISTAR of [ARBELA].
 16. O Esarhaddon, king of AS[SYRIA],
 17. in ASSUR, NINEVEH,
 18. CALAH, (and) ARBELA,
 19. long days,
 20. extended years,
 21. to Esarhaddon my king
 22. will I give.
 23, 24. Thy great protection (?) am I,
 25, 26. thy defending guide (?) am I,
 27. who long days,
 28. extended years,
 29, 30. (and) thy throne beneath the great heavens, have
 established.
 31. In a habitation (?) of gold
 32. in the midst of heaven I will guard (thee).
 33. The light of the diamond
 34. before Esarhaddon king of ASSYRIA,
 35. I will cause to shine,
 36. like the diadem of my head
 37. I will guard him.
 38. Fear not, O king,
 39. I have spoken to thee,
 40. I have not neglected (?) [thee].

(Continued in Column IV.)

COLUMN IV

1. I have trusted (?) [thee]
 2. I will not mistrust (?) [thee].
 3. The river in safety
 4. I will cause thee to cross
 5, 6. O Esarhaddon, faithful son, child of BELTIS
 7. the girded (?), the strong (?),
 8. with my hands

9. thine enemies
10. I will put an end to
11. O Esarhaddon, king of ASSYRIA,
12. cup which is full of sweet drink (?)
13. casket (?) which is full of shekels—
14. Esarhaddon, in the city ASSUR
15. long days (and)
16. extended years
17. I will give to thee.
18. Esarhaddon, in the midst of ARBELA
19. thy defending shield am I
20. O Esarhaddon, faithful son,
21. child of BELTIS
- 22, 23. (with) wise (?) intelligence (?)
24. I will exalt [thee and]
25. constantly¹
26. with [thy] companions²
27. in the great heavens
28. I will commune with thee.
29. On thy right
30. the strong shall destroy
31. On [thy] left
32. I will cause fire [to burn?].
33. The kingdom over
34. enduring (?)
35. over

(The remainder of the Column is lost)

COLUMN V

1. From before him.
2. He shall not receive
3. the many things
4. pleasant
5. which they will speak—
6. before his feet
7. I will cut them off.

¹ Or "greatly."

² Literally "force."

8. Thou, even thou
9. art king of kings

10. From the mouth of Istar-bêla-daini,
11. the choice¹ (?) of the king

12. I am the lady of ARBELA.
13. To the mother of the king :—
14. As thou hast supplicated me
15. everything from the right (and)
16. from the left
17. in thy lap thou shalt place.
18. What is mine,
19. the offspring of my heart,
20. (in) the desert thou causedst to lie down.
21. Now, O king, fear not—
22. the kingdom is strong,
23. the power is strong also.

24. From the mouth of Mimma-âbî-sa,
25. a daughter of ARBELA.

26. Peace to Esarhaddon, king of ASSYRIA.
27. O ISTAR of ARBELA,
28. unto the desert thou broughtest (him) forth.
29. Peace to her little one—
30. to the midst of the city she has sent (him) ;
31. to the
32. which
33. the man

(The rest of the Column is lost)

COLUMN VI

1.
2. [ARB]FLA

¹ *Selutu*, not an ordinary feminine attributive noun, but an abstract.

-
3. good
 4. of ARBELA
 5. his hand
 6. thou hast filled (or, ye have filled).
 7. The former word
 8. which I spoke to thee
 9. thou hast not relied on ;
 10. Now
 11. on the later one
 12. rely and
 13. glorify me.
 14. When the day
 15. dawns bright,
 16. may pure (sacrifices)
 17. be completed.
 18. In my presence glorify me.
 19. The torn things
 20. [from] the midst of my palace (temple)
 21. [thou] shalt send forth,
 22. pure food thou shalt eat,
 23. pure waters
 24. thou shalt drink,
 25. in the midst of thy palace
 26. thou shalt be pure ;
 27. thy son, thy son's son,
 28. the kingdom
 29. by the blessing of NERGAL
 30. shall rule.
-
31. From the mouth of Lâ-dagil-îli,
 32. a son of ARBELA.

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