

THE INSCRIPTION OF ASSUR-BÊL-KALA

TRANSLATED BY S. ARTHUR STRONG

ONE of the most striking and interesting of the monuments of Assyrian art, preserved in the British Museum, is the statue numbered 849. It is a nude female figure, sadly mutilated, so much so, in fact, that little more than the trunk remains: but the subject has been treated in a style and on a scale which at once arrest the attention of the observer accustomed to the draped formality and minute detail of the Assyrian craftsmen.

The back is covered by a partly defaced inscription which is no less important historically than the figure itself artistically, for it is the sole document bequeathed to us by Assur-bêl-Kala,¹ who more than a thousand years B.C. succeeded his father, the great Tiglath-pileser, as King of Assyria. The text is as follows:—

TRANSLITERATION

1. êkal Assur-bêl-Ka[la] . . . sar kis[sati] . . .
2. apil Tukulti-apil-Esarra . . . [sarru?] dan[nu] . . .

¹ It is true that the King's name occurs on another small fragment (Layard, 73), which probably once formed part of a votive inscription; but in this case the remains are too scanty to enable us to determine with certainty either the character of the document or to whom it belonged.

3. apil Asur-ris-isi sar kis[sati sar As[surma
4. alamgâtê annâtê ki[rib?] . . . âlâni
5. u arrutê ina mukkhitsi akhiê . . .
6. munikir sidhriia u sumiia A[num u?] ilâni
7. Martu mikhits tsîri imakhatsus

TRANSLATION

1. The palace of Assur-bêl-Kala . . . King of the whole (world), [King of Assyria],
2. son of Tiglathpileser . . . the strong king . . .
3. son of Assur-ris-isi, King of the whole (world), King of the same Assyria :—
4. These images in the midst of . . . the cities
5. and cursings with the crushing of the side . . .
6. Whosoever alters my writing and my name the god Anu and the gods of
7. Martu with the crushing of the back shall crush him.

It will be seen that the text is so mutilated that whatever clue it may once have afforded to the meaning and purpose of the statue, lies now beyond recovery. The figure has naturally enough been called an Istar, though not a vestige of her name can be traced. If it were possible to conclude, from the use of the plural in line 4, that our example formed one member of a series, we might perhaps detect in it the sole surviving trace of some forgotten exploit or scheme of Assur-bêl-Kala. For we know that two centuries later Rammân-nirârî III. tried to introduce the worship of Nebo into Assyria, or rather to establish it there in a position of privilege; and he has left us a record of his pious purposes inscribed on two twin statues of the god. It seems, therefore,

not improbable that in a similar way Assur-bêl-Kala may have sought to found or to promote the worship of some special patroness of his own, either in Assyria or in the West, and that one of her effigies—unfortunately no longer recognisable—has accidentally come down to us.

But there is one feature of the text which stands out, as it were, in high relief from the surrounding obscurity, and that is, the mention of the gods of Martu, or the land of the Amorites: and though it by no means necessarily follows from this that the statue is that of an Amoritish goddess, and the work of an Amoritish craftsman, still, on the other hand, there is nothing to exclude the bare possibility of such an assumption, either in the style of the figure or in its history. But however this may be, there is one result that seems certainly to follow from the appearance in this place of the gods of Martu, namely, that Assur-bêl-Kala had not relaxed his hold over the regions of the West, which the prowess of his father had added to the Assyrian Empire.¹

The text—originally published in the first volume of *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Plate 6, No. vi., but with so many errors as to render it unintelligible—has been the subject of attempts at translation by Oppert (*Expédition*, i. 288) and

¹ [This fact would be emphasised by the rendering I prefer to give of the 4th line, where I divide the words differently from Mr. Strong, and would accordingly translate: "these images in the [countries], cities and villages I set up on pedestals(?)." In this case the images would have been specially intended for erection in Syria. *Alamgâtê* seems to be a foreign word.—ED.]

Menant (*Annales*, 54). An account of the monument, with an amended edition and translation of the text, will be found in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, April 1892.¹

¹ I have here adopted the readings *alangâtê* (l. 4) and A[num] (l. 6) in preference to those given in the *J. R. A. S.*

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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