

## A PRAYER OF ASSURBANIPAL

TRANSLATED BY MR. S. ARTHUR STRONG

THE following text is inscribed on a tablet of clay numbered 1285 in the Kouyunjik collection of the British Museum. It is remarkable not only as an almost perfect specimen of the later Assyrian caligraphy, but for containing a number of rare words and forms—a circumstance which has not made the task of translation and explanation easier. But its chief claim upon our interest and attention lies in the fact that the unknown author displays a depth and delicacy of religious emotion not often reached in Assyrian literature, and hardly surpassed even by the great masters of the emotional style—the Hebrew psalmists. On the one hand it is distinguished from the mass of anonymous compositions which we are accustomed to call hymns and penitential psalms by the absence of any traces of a magical character or purpose, while on the other its passionate and unconventional tone forms a striking contrast to the style usually adopted by Assyrian kings, who even when ascribing unto their lords glory and honour never forget their own titles, but compose monotonous

variations in strict official form upon the three themes of pride, flattery, and fear.

The text consists of a series of confessions or appeals on the part of Assurbanipal addressed not, as we might perhaps have expected, to Istar but to Nebo. These the god answers at intervals in words of consolation and encouragement. Throughout the text Assurbanipal is never called king. On the contrary, in one of his replies Nebo reminds him of his smallness and helplessness when an infant.

That these confessions and complaints may have been drawn from Assurbanipal by the stress of some political crisis is of course possible. We know of at least one such instance in his career; but the text contains absolutely no positive data such as would enable us to connect it with a definite event. The most that can be said is that it cannot be later than 626 B.C.

A striking feature of the inscription is the number of unusual verb-forms. They occur in almost every line, and I suggest that they may be explained as a rhythmical device of the composer.

The text has never been published;<sup>1</sup> but a free translation was contributed by Prof. Oppert to the second volume of Ledrain's *Histoire d'Israel* (p. 486). This, however, unaccompanied as it is by any explanation of the renderings proposed, I have in most cases been unable to comprehend much less to follow.

<sup>1</sup> It will appear with a philological commentary in the *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists*.

## A PRAYER OF ASSUR-BANI-PAL

### OBVERSE

1. . . . . I confess to thee, NEBO, in the assembly of the great gods :<sup>1</sup>
2. . . . . my sins, my soul is not subdued :<sup>2</sup>
3. . . . . NINEVEH, I make my prayer unto thee, warrior of the gods, his brothers :
4. . . . . the life of Assur-bani-pal for a long time, hereafter :
5. . . . . I prostrate myself at the feet of NEBO :
6. . . . . NEBO, in the whole multitude of my sins.
7. I will cause thee to live, Assur-bani-pal, even I, NEBO, to everlasting days :
8. Thy feet shall not be weary, thy hands shall not tremble :<sup>3</sup>
9. These thy lips shall not fail for praying to me :
10. Thy tongue shall not be put out from thy lips,
11. For I goodly speech will bestow upon thee :
12. I will go forward as thy head, I will make thy body<sup>4</sup> to go forward in the house of Ê-BARBAR.

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13. NEBO spake thus : Thy mouth utters good things,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Psalm xxxi. 5 : "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord."

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we should supply *ina pukhur*, as in line 29, and translate : "Through the whole multitude of my sins my soul is not subdued." Cf. Psalm lxx. 3 : "My misdeeds prevail against me."

<sup>3</sup> Compare the words of Istar to Assur-bani-pal (Smith's *Assur-bani-pal*, p. 125) : "Thy face shall not grow pale, thy feet shall not totter"; and Isaiah xl. 31 : "They shall run and not be weary."

<sup>4</sup> *Lân-ka*, literally "thy side." The translation of the verb is doubtful owing to the uncertainty of the phonetic value of the second character employed in writing it. Perhaps we should read *amattakh*, "I will magnify."

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14. which have been offered in prayer to URKITTU :<sup>1</sup>
15. Thy body which I made has been brought before me  
in supplication, according to her appointment in  
Ê-BARBAR :
16. The destiny which I formed has been brought before  
me in supplication,
17. Thus:—May he have a reward in the house of the  
Queen of the Universe !<sup>2</sup>
18. Thy life has been brought before me in supplication  
thus:—His life do thou prolong, [even the life] of  
Assur-bani-pal !
- 
19. Bowing down in his sanctuary Assur-bani-pal made his  
prayer to NEBO his lord :
20. I have given myself unto thee, NEBO, thou wilt not  
forsake me, [even] me :
21. My life in thy presence is governed, my soul is held  
in the embrace of BELTIS :<sup>3</sup>
22. I have given myself unto thee, NEBO [thou] mighty one,  
thou wilt not forsake me, even me, in the midst of  
my sins.
- 
23. There answered a breath from the presence of NEBO  
his lord :—
24. Fear not, Assur-bani-pal, long life will I give unto  
thee :
25. Fair winds from thy life<sup>4</sup> will I appoint :
26. My mouth speaking that which is good shall cause thy  
prayer to be heard in the assembly of the great  
gods.
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<sup>1</sup> Urkittu can hardly be a name or title of Nebo, and must therefore be an independent divinity, who, so far as I can find, appears for the first time in this passage. The phrase in line 29, "the reed of Urkittu," is interesting when we remember that *urqîtu* signifies "grass."

<sup>2</sup> My rendering of this line is only tentative.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Psalm xxxvi. 9 : "With thee is the fountain of life."

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps we should read *ina* or *itti* instead of *ultu*, "from," and translate : "I will appoint fair winds (*i.e.* favourable circumstances) to be in," or "with thy life" (*i.e.* to pervade it).

## REVERSE

27. Assur-bani-pal confessed his misdeeds: he made his prayer unto NEBO his lord:
28. What he took at the feet of the queen of NINEVEH he did not conceal in the assembly of the great gods:
29. That which with the reed of URKITTU is acquired he did not conceal<sup>1</sup> [even] in the whole multitude of his sins:
30. In the whole multitude of my offences thou wilt not forsake me, NEBO:
31. In the whole multitude of my woes thou wilt not forsake my soul.
- 
32. Small wert thou, Assur-bani-pal, when I gave you over to [the care of] the Queen of NINEVEH:
33. A suckling<sup>2</sup> wert thou, Assur-bani-pal, when I satisfied thee on the lap of the Queen of NINEVEH:
34. The full streams of milk which into thy mouth are given twain thou suckest, twain thou drawest into thy mouth:
35. Thy sins, Assur-bani-pal, like ripples<sup>3</sup> on the face of water shall they be:
36. Like sandhills (?)<sup>4</sup> which on the face of the earth are piled up shall they be dispersed before thy feet:
37. Thou shalt stand, Assur-bani-pal, in the presence of the great gods: thou shalt magnify NEBO.

<sup>1</sup> *Iluadh* for *ilâdh*, like *imuat* for *imât*.

<sup>2</sup> *Lakû* is given in *W. A. I.* v. 23, 33-4, as a synonym of *daddû*, "breast," and *tsikhru*, "small." Cf. Isaiah lxvi. 11-13: "That ye may suck, and be satisfied. Ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees, as one whom his mother comforteth."

<sup>3</sup> *'Sîpi*, as in Arabic.

<sup>4</sup> *Burbillatê*. The parallelism demands some such signification as this.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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