

TABLETS OF TEL EL-AMARNA RELATING
TO PALESTINE IN THE CENTURY
BEFORE THE EXODUS

TRANSLATED BY THE EDITOR

IN the winter of 1887 a very remarkable discovery was made among the mounds of Tel el-Amarna in Upper Egypt. Tel el-Amarna lies on the eastern bank of the Nile about midway between Minieh and Siout, and its extensive ruins cover the site of the capital of Amenôphis IV, or Khu-en-Aten, the so-called "Heretic King" of the eighteenth Egyptian dynasty. Khu-en-Aten was the son of Amenôphis III by a Syrian princess Teie, who, as we now know was the daughter of Duisratta, the king of Mitanni or Nahrina, the Aram Naharaim of Scripture (Judges iii. 8), a Mesopotamian district which lay opposite to the Hittite city of Carchemish. Like his father, Khu-en-Aten surrounded himself with Semitic officers and courtiers, and after his accession to the throne publicly professed himself a convert to the religion of his mother, which consisted in the adoration of the winged solar disk, called Aten in Egyptian. His rejection of the faith of his fathers soon brought

about a rupture with the powerful priesthood of Thebes, and Khu-en-Aten eventually left his ancestral capital and built himself and his followers a new capital further north, the site of which is now known as Tel el-Amarna. Here in the neighbouring cliffs and desert are found the tombs of the adherents of the new Egyptian creed, and here Khu-en-Aten reigned and died. He was succeeded by one or two converts to the foreign religion ; but their reigns were brief, and after a short while the Pharaoh returned to the worship of the Egyptian gods, the new capital of Khu-en-Aten was deserted, and the foreign faith suppressed.

On his departure from Thebes, Khu-en-Aten had carried with him the archives of the kingdom, and it is a portion of these that the *fellahin* discovered in 1887 among the foundations of the royal palace. They consist of clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform writing of the Babylonian type and in the Babylonian language. The tablets are copies of letters and despatches from the kings and governors of Babylonia and Assyria, of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Eastern Kappadokia, of Phœnicia and Palestine, and they prove that all over the civilised East, in the century before the Exodus, active literary intercourse was carried on through the medium of a common literary language—that of Babylonia, and the complicated Babylonian script. It is evident, therefore, that throughout Western Asia schools and libraries must have existed, in which clay tablets inscribed with

cuneiform characters were stored up, and where the language and syllabary of Babylonia were taught and learned. Such a library must have existed in the Canaanite city of Kirjath-Sepher or "Book-town" (Judges i. 11), and if its site can ever be recovered and excavated we may expect to find there its collection of books written upon imperishable clay.

Among the correspondents of the Egyptian sovereigns were Assur-yuballidh of Assyria and Burna-buryas of Babylonia, which thus fix the date of Khu-en-Aten to about 1430 B.C. Palestine and Phœnicia were garrisoned at the time by Egyptian troops, and there were as yet no traces of the Israelite in the land. But the Canaanitish population was already threatened by an enemy from the north. These were the Hittites, to whom references are made in several of the despatches from Syria and Phœnicia. After the weakening of the Egyptian power in consequence of the religious troubles which followed the death of Khu-en-Aten, the Hittites were enabled to complete their conquests in the south and to drive a wedge between the Semites of the East and the West. With the revival of the Egyptian empire under the rulers of the nineteenth dynasty the southward course of Hittite conquest was checked, but the wars of Ramses II against the Hittites of Kadesh on the Orontes desolated and exhausted Canaan and prepared the way for the Israelitish invasion.

Two facts of special interest to the Biblical student

result from the discovery of the tablets of Tel el-Amarna. In the first place, as has been seen, the date of the Exodus has been approximately determined; at all events, the Egyptologists have been shown to be right in not assigning it to an earlier period than B.C. 1320, that is to say, the reign of Meneptah the son and successor of Ramses II. In the second place, light is thrown upon the statement of Exodus (i. 8) that the Pharaoh of the oppression was "a new king which knew not Joseph." We learn from the tablets that Khu-en-Aten was not only half Semitic in descent and wholly Semitic in faith, he also surrounded himself with officers and courtiers of Phœnician or Canaanitish extraction. The Vizier himself, who stood next to the monarch, and like him is addressed as "lord," bore the name of Dûdu, the Dodo and David of the Old Testament, which belonged specifically to the land of Canaan. Most of the Egyptian governors and lieutenants from whom the king received his despatches had similarly Semitic names, and it is clear that not only were Semitic culture and religion dominant in Egypt, but most of the offices of state were in Semitic hands. The rise of the nineteenth dynasty under Ramses I. marked the reaction against Semitic influence, and brought with it the expulsion of the foreigner. Thebes became once more the capital of the kingdom, and the Egyptian priesthood and aristocracy took their revenge upon the hated stranger. Had the insurrection of Arabi been successful, the Europeans would

have fared in our day as the Semites fared in the days of Ramses.

The translations which follow are those of tablets which I have copied at Cairo. I have selected for the most part the despatches which were sent from Southern Palestine. The originals are all preserved in the Museum of Boulaq, with the exception of No. III, which was in the possession of M. Urbain Bouriant, the director of the French Archæological School in Cairo, at the time I copied it. Transliterations of the texts, with notes, will appear in a paper of mine on "The tablets of Tel el-Amarna now in Egypt"; a general account of the tablets at Boulaq and in Berlin will be found in Dr. Hugo Winckler's *Bericht ueber die Thontafeln von Tell-el-Amarna*, in the *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, No. 51, December 1888.

It may be added that Amenôphis III and his son Amenôphis IV Khu-en-Aten are addressed in the tablets by their *prænomina*, Nimmuriya and Nimutriya corresponding to the name read Mâ-nib-rî by Professor Maspero, Napkhurururiya to Nofir-khopiru-rî. Napkhurururiya is also found abbreviated into Khuri(ya), which explains why in the Greek lists Oros occupies the place of Khu-en-Aten.

DESPATCHES FROM PALESTINE IN THE
CENTURY BEFORE THE EXODUS.

No. I¹

1. To the king, my lord,
2. my gods,² my Sun-god,³
3. by letter
4. I speak,⁴ even I Su-arda-ka⁵
5. thy servant, the dust of thy feet :
6. at the feet of the king my lord,
7. my gods, my Sun-god,
8. seven times seven do I prostrate myself.
9. The king of (the country of) . . . directed the mouth
10. to make war :
11. in the city of KELTE⁶
12. he made war against thee the third time.
13. A cry (for assistance) to myself
14. was brought. My city
15. belonging to myself
16. *adhered to* (?) me.
17. Ebed-tob⁷ sends
18. to the men of KELTE ;

¹ No. XI in my forthcoming paper on the tablets of Tel el-Amarna.

² This is a curious parallelism to the use of the plural *Elohim* in Hebrew for the singular "God."

³ The Egyptian Pharaoh was not only "the son of the Sun," but was also identified with the Sun-god himself.

⁴ *Ki dhema atma.*

⁵ Su-arda-ka is a purely Assyro-Babylonian name, and shows how far the cultivated classes of Western Asia had gone in adopting the Babylonian language.

⁶ The Hebrew Keilah (*Josh. xv. 44, 1 Sam. xxiii.*), now Kila.

⁷ Abd-Dhabba, which may, however, also be read Abd-Khima. Compare the names of Tab-Rimmon (*1 Kings, xv. 18*), and Tab-el (*Is. vii. 6*).

19. he sends 14 pieces of silver, and
20. they marched against my rear ;
21. and the domains of the king my lord
22. they overran. KELTE
23. my city Ebed-tob
24. removed from my jurisdiction ;
25. the *pleasure park* (?) of the king my lord
26. and the fortress of Bel-nathan ¹
27. and the fortress of Hamor ² from
28. before him and his justice
29. he removed. Lab-api
30. the *halting* (?) in speech occupied
31. the fortress of . . . NINU and
32. now Lab-api
33. together with Ebed-tob and
34. [his men] has occupied the fortress of . . . NINU
35. . . . when the king to his servant

Lacuna.

ON THE EDGE

1. As regards this matter, No !
2. twice has the king returned (this) answer.

NO. II ³

The commencement of the despatch is lost.

1. (And) again the city of PIR(GAR ?),⁴
2. a fortress which (is) in front of this country,
3. I made faithful to the king. At the same time
4. the city of GAZA ⁵ belonging to the king which (is) on
the coast of the sea

¹ Written ideographically EN-MU, in Assyrian Bil-nadin.

² Written with the ideograph of "ass" *emer*, Heb. *khamôr*. There is a similar play upon the name of the Amorite in the Old Testament, Gen. xxxiv. 2, etc. compared with xlvi. 22.

³ No. X in my forthcoming Paper.

⁴ The traces of the last character composing the name of the city seem to show that it was *gar*.

⁵ *Khasati-ki*.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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