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THREE ASSYRIOLOGICAL FOOTNOTES TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

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THE purpose of these notes is to bring to the attention of Old Testament students some unnoticed passages of R. F. Harper's *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters* (14 volumes, 1892-1914) that have a bearing on the history and religion of the Israelites.

1. *Ilāni* = *Elohim*

The plural of *ilu* (god) used, like *elohim* in the O. T., in the sense of "deity" is well known in the Tell-el-Amarna correspondence (cf. Hehn, *Die Biblische und die Babylonische Gottesidee*, Leipzig 1913, pp. 171 ff.), but the occurrences of this idiom in the time of Ashurbanipal have been generally overlooked. Hehn (*loc. cit.*) notes but a single instance in Harper's *Letters*. Several passages listed below have been collected by Behrens (*Assyrisch-babylonische Briefe kultischen Inhalts*, Leipzig 1906, p. 6, note 2).

a) "Ashur my deity" (*ilāni-ia*): Harper 287 rev. 8; 290 obv. 12; 292 obv. 6; 297 obv. 6; 1170 obv. 10 f.

b) *Ilāni* used with the verb in the singular: "As to the man who serves according to the command of his lords (*bēlē-šu*, his master?), the *shedū* deity (*ilāni*), his [. . .], will lead him (*iraddi-šu*) on an auspicious path" (118 obv. 9 ff.). "On the second day the deity (*ilāni*) of the king will protect (us) (*inaṣur*)" (433 obv. 6 ff.). "Your deity (*ilāni-ka*), if anyone has had something to do with the matter, has (indeed) given express orders (*šutu-ma pi-šu ittidin*)" (392 rev. 9 ff.).

c) Adjectival use of *ilāni* in the genitive (for the parallel construction of *elohim* see Arnold, *Ephod and Ark*, pp. 29 ff., 35 f.): "The sacred stable" (*urū ša ilāni*) (65 obv. 20); "the sacred charioteer" (*mukil-asāte ša ilāni*) (65 obv. 21-rev. 1); "the divine ordinances" (*parṣē ša ilāni*) (65 rev. 10); "your temple" (*bit ilāni-ka*) (532 rev. 10); "the temple" (*bit ilāni*) (566 rev. 6).

2. Judah's tribute to Assyria

Harper, *Letters*, No. 632, is a report of the payment of tribute on the part of Judah and of neighboring nations to the Assyrian king. It reads: "Two mana of gold the Ammonites, one mana of gold the Moabites, ten mana of silver the Judeans, [...] mana of silver the [Edomites (?)], [...] the Gublites (i. e. the people of Gebal or Byblus), unto (?) the king my lord have sent." (Obv. ¹ *II ma-na ḥuraši* ² *matu* *bit am-man-na-a-a* ³ *I ma-na ḥuraši* ⁴ *matu* *mu'-ba-a-a* ⁵ *X ma-na kaspi* ⁶ *matu* *ya-u-da-a-a* ⁷ [... *ma-n*] *a kaspi* ⁸ ... *-a-a* ⁹ ... (Rev.) ¹ ... ² [*matu* *gu*] *ub-la-a-a* ³ [*ana ir*] *ti (?) ša šarri beli-ia* ⁴ *us-si-bi-lu-u-ni*).

The nations seem to be ordered according to the amount paid, beginning with the largest. The sums are surprisingly small and must represent payments of annual tribute rather than war indemnities. The fact that Judah pays less than the Moabites and less than half of the amount sent by the Ammonites, sanctions the inference that this report should be dated after 701 B. C., when Sennacherib had materially reduced, impoverished, and depopulated the kingdom of Hezekiah. It is safe to assume that the payment was made either to Esarhaddon (681-668) or to Ashurbanipal (668-625) by Manasseh (691-638), who is named by both these Assyrian rulers in a list of 12 faithful vassals of Southern Syria and Phoenicia, together with the kings of the nations mentioned in this report (*Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek* II, pp. 149 and 239).

This unique record is important both for Assyrian and for Palestinian history. Lists giving the exact amount of annual tribute paid to Assyria are very scarce. In his *History of Assyria* (1923), Olmstead mentions but three (pp. 129, 383, 607),

covering other territories, overlooking, however, the text under discussion. The Old Testament gives occasionally the exact amount of war indemnities (2 Ki. 15 19; 18 14; 23 33) but, with the exception of the tribute in kind paid by Mesha of Moab to Omri (2 Ki. 3 4; LXX^B, however, regards it as an indemnity), never specifies the sums paid annually by a king to his foreign overlord.

3. *The earliest reference to the kiblah*

It was probably in Babylonia soon after 586 B. C. that the Jews began to turn their faces toward Jerusalem, or more exactly toward the spot where the Holy of Holies had stood, in their prayers. Ezekiel (8 16) condemns in the strongest terms the practice of worshipping the sun with the back toward the temple and the face toward the East. The post-exilic prayer of Solomon (1 Ki. 8 44, 48) and later passages in the Old Testament (Ps. 5 8 [Eng. 5 7]; 28 2; Dan. 6 11 [Eng. 6 10]) and in the Apocrypha (Tobit 3 11; 3 Ezra 4 58) assume that Jews in foreign countries turned their faces in the direction of Jerusalem in their worship of Jehovah. This custom is alluded to in the Mishnah (*Berakoth* 4 5). Jerome, commenting on Ez. 8 16, writes, "*Praecipiente ipso Domino per Moysen, quoad nequaquam in morem Gentilium contra Orientem Deum orare deberent, sed in quacumque fuissent orbis parte . . . adorarent contra templum.*"

This Jewish custom, which was adopted by Mohammed (Koran 2 136-145) and became a characteristic feature of Islamic worship, has not been noticed, to my knowledge, in the ancient religions before the exile. It is, therefore, interesting to note a clear allusion to the *kiblah* in a letter written from Erech before 625 B. C., presumably to Ashurbanipal (Harper, *Letters*, No. 1387). The purpose of this communication, so far as it can be made out from the mutilated condition of the tablet, which as yet has not been published in translation, seems to be to assure the Assyrian king of the devotion of leading citizens of Erech. The unknown writer prays Ishtar and Nana for the preservation of the life of the king of countries, his lord, for the stability of his royal throne, for

the overthrow of his enemy, for his peace, and for the skill and productivity of his craftsmen. He assures the king that Bel and the Lady of Erech, Nabu and Nana, by graciously turning their countenances toward Assyria, will grant blessings. A number of men and the nobility of Erech assure the writer that they are with him and add, after a passage that is not clear, "As formerly we turn our faces to Assyria in our prayers to the gods [or: deity] of the king." (Rev. ^a *ki-i* ⁹ *ša mah-ri-im-me pa-ni-ni* ¹⁰ *a-na* ^{not} *aššur* ¹¹ *ni-iš-kun* ¹¹ *ina ŷu-li-e ša ilāni ša šarri*). The allusion to the *kiblah* is unmistakable: the turning of the face toward Assyria in praying to Assyrian gods is evidently a well established usage dating from earlier days. Not the least surprising peculiarity of this statement is the assumption that the prayers offered in Erech by people turning their faces toward Assyria could be heard by the gods of that country in the distant North. Such a spiritual conception of the deity is truly astonishing at this time outside of the Old Testament. Even though the Jewish exiles in Babylonia would presumably have turned their faces toward Jerusalem, when they offered prayer, independently of external influences, we may well suppose that the existence of this Babylonian usage contributed to give a permanent character to the institution of the *kiblah* among the Jews.