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W. M. Flinders Petrie

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SYRIA AND EGYPT
FROM THE
TELL EL AMARNA LETTERS

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

I. DURING the age of the decline of Egyptian power in Syria, when the great conquests of Tahutmes I. were all gradually lost, a splendid store of information was laid by for us in the cuneiform correspondence at Tell el Amarna. The clay tablets, mostly from Syria, but with a few duplicates of letters from Egypt, were deposited in "The place of the records of the palace of the king," as it is called upon the stamped bricks which I found still remaining there. A few years ago the natives, while plundering about the ruins and carrying off Akhenaten's bricks for their modern houses, lit upon this record chamber containing many hundreds of tablets. These were shown to dealers; they

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sent some to Dr. Oppert, at Paris, who pronounced them to be forgeries; others were sent to M. Grebaut, then head of the Department of Antiquities, and were treated by him with customary silence. At last, when they were supposed to be almost worthless, a quantity were carried in sacks to Luqsor to hawk about among the dealers there, and these were largely ground to pieces on the way. What has been preserved, therefore, is but a wreck of what might have been, had any person equal to the occasion placed his hand upon them in time. The tablets thus reaching the dealers' hands became known, and were bought up mainly for the British Museum and the Berlin Museum. Some drifted to St. Petersburg, Paris, and the Cairo Museums; and some into the private collections of Murch, Rostowicz, and others. A similar miserable fate attends all discoveries in Egypt, unless made by a skilled observer, as witness the palace of Ramessu III. at Tell el Yehudiyeh, the Deir el Bahri treasure, the cemetery of Ekhmim, the palace of Amenhotep III. at Thebes, as well as unnumbered cemeteries and towns throughout the land.

The tablets thus dispersed were published

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in many different ways and places ; and the first synopsis of the whole was given in the second volume of my *History of Egypt*. But since then a much larger number have been published, with a more critical and definitive text of the whole by Hugo Winckler, in *The Tell el Amarna Letters*. All the summaries of the letters which I made before have been now revised with Winckler's translations, and summaries of all the new ones have been made from those translations. I have retained the original references to the older translations, because Winckler's edition is so extremely bald and deficient in general information, so purely a linguistic exercise and not an effective edition, that the older publications are still of value for details of place, state, docketts, &c. But in every case Winckler's number, W. n., is placed against each summary.

2. With regard to transliteration I have departed from the system used by Winckler, not without good reason. The rage for employing out-of-the-way and little-known symbols in place of effective letters which are understood, threatens to place historical and linguistic works as much outside of the ordinary reader's pronunciation as a set of

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chemical symbols or differential equations. When almost everything required can be expressed in commonly known terms, there is a pedantry about adopting what only specialists can read. Double letters, if in common use, are no real objection, as in the few cases where sh, th, kh, ts, &c., are really two separate letters, it is easy to put a hyphen between them to separate them. No mistake can thus arise; everyone can read and understand the names, and only the theoretic beauty of one letter, one sign, is interfered with. I accordingly use kh for kheth, th for teth, y for yod, s for samekh, ts for tsade, q for qoph, and sh for shin. When we may come to see Greek names written as Tales, Ahilles, Pilippos, &c., it will be time enough to suppose that double letters are not wanted. In no possible case in any system should the sign j be used instead of y, as for the greater part of mankind it means a soft g, and the y sign cannot be misunderstood.

The summaries of each letter that are given here include every name of person or of place that occurs in the letter, every fact mentioned which can be of value for judging of the positions of persons or the conditions

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of affairs, and any presents or objects named. In short nothing is omitted but verbiage and phrases which are of no value for the history or the understanding of the position. The summaries are all that need to be compared and considered for their connections; yet in all important cases the full translations have been referred to here, when working out the history and geography, in order to make certain that no minute details were overlooked.

3. The order of the letters has been determined by dividing them into three main classes: (1) Royal letters and others during the peaceful times of Amenhotep III., and early in Amenhotep IV.; (2) the North Syrian war; (3) the South Syrian or Palestine war.

In the first class the letters of different places have no chronological interlocking, and therefore each kingdom and person is taken separately.

In the second class the main backbone of the sequence is in the history of Ribaddi; and in the third series the history of Abd-khiba (or Ebed-tob as formerly rendered) is the main sequence.

The first step was to place the letters of

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each of these personal histories in the order of time, judging from the waning power of these allies of Egypt. The towns which they successively lost, and the difficulties in which they were, serve to fit the letters very closely together one after the other. The frequent changes of residence of Ribaddi have particularly to be noticed, as otherwise all the letters from one residence of his might be supposed to be earlier or later than those from another residence. No change of residence has been assumed here, except what is clearly required by the sequence of events that are named. In particular we may note the phrase, "May Baalat of Gubla give power to my lord the king." Such an invocation of the local deity might be supposed to show that the letter was written from Gubla. After settling the order and the locality of each letter of Ribaddi, as far as is shown by the evidence of events, then the invocations of the goddess of Gubla were tabulated. In most cases such letters appeared to have been written from Gubla. The results appear thus, the letters naming "Baalat of Gubla" or "Gubla your handmaid" are thirty-two in all; of these, from the events, I classed:—

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22 written in Gubla.
 3 „ „ Berut.
 7 early uncertain ones.

—

32 naming Gubla.

Of letters not naming Gubla in a gratuitous manner, there are twenty-five in all; of these, from the events, I classed:—

11 written in Gubla.
 10 „ „ Berut.
 2 „ „ Tsumura.
 2 early uncertain ones.

—

25 not naming Gubla.

Here, then, the test of the gratuitous naming of Gubla is almost restricted to letters written from Gubla, and it might seem, therefore, that in three cases I had made a mistake, in attributing three of this class to Berut; but in one of these three we have the positive proof that an invocation of Baalat of Gebal might be written elsewhere, as Ribaddi says (No. 211, Winckler 62), “And behold at this time I am in Berut.” Hence I see no reason to change to Gubla the venue of the other two letters.

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The above test, therefore, is not conclusive; but it is interesting as showing that of the letters naming Gubla my arrangement only gives one in eight to other places; while of those not naming Gubla my arrangement gives more than half to other places. This is a perfectly unbiassed test, as it was not visible in the summaries which I arranged, and was never looked at in the letters until all the present arrangement was done.

4. Another matter to be noted is the change of allegiance of persons and places. Such change is always shown in the indices of persons and of places by a star; the references before the star (if any) being friendly to Egypt, the references after the star (if any) being hostile to Egypt. In many cases, however, there is a dubious period in which there are conflicting statements from different parties; in such cases the references that are dubious are placed between two stars. Such dubious references arise from several causes. Sometimes a man was misrepresented by his enemies in order to prejudice him in the opinion of the Egyptians. Sometimes an enemy of the Egyptians continued to claim to be on their

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side as long as he could. But the more usual case seems to have been that the Egyptians had lost interest in Syria, lost the power of sparing troops to manage the country and to keep order, and lost heart in foreign matters since they were absorbed in the home politics of religious revolutions. So soon as the strong hand of the power of Egypt ceased to act in all emergencies, to interfere in every squabble, and to make capital out of the internal discords of the Syrians—so soon the Syrians began their old life of aggression one on the other. It was just what we see every year in India; any place without a garrison is liable to outbursts of the old feud of Hindu faith against Muhamedan. So it was in Syria; all the petty chiefs and shekhs whose ancestors had been cutting each other's throats for generations, and who, doubtless, had venerable blood-feuds unavenged, soon began to attack one another when not vigorously kept in hand by Egypt. Also any strong and capable man like Abdashirta and his son Aziru, soon found that he could safely bully his neighbours, and gradually acquire power over them.

Hence the weakening of Egypt threw

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Syria into a state of internal discord unrepressed. The immediate effect of this was that various parties, without caring particularly about being for or against the Egyptians, began to fight with one another. Each tried to draw the power of Egypt to his own side by representing that he was loyally acting in the interest of his suzerain; and the weaker party was sure to place his trust most fully upon Egypt. It was only when a man had played his own hand for a long time, had strengthened himself by absorbing much of his neighbour's goods and lands, and had safely neglected the orders of the Egyptians on several occasions—it was only then that he cared to throw off the mask and act openly in his own interest, and allow himself to be classed as an enemy. Hence we often find very different views of people, and might put them as being on the Egyptian side according to their own account long after they were on the enemies' side according to other accounts.

5. A very important consideration which has not been worked out hitherto lies in the few chronological details which can be gathered. It is obvious that excepting a