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A. H. Sayce

Excerpt

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AN ASSYRIAN GRAMMAR.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE Assyrian language was spoken in the countries watered by the Tigris and Euphrates. It was bounded on the north by the Aryan populations of Armenia and Media, and on the east by the Turanian dialects of Elam. With the exception of one or two doubtful words preserved in classical writers, such as *πανδοῦρα* (Pollux, iv. 60), *Armahar* (Plin. H. vi. 30), all that remains of it is to be found in the cuneiform inscriptions. These, though fragmentary, are copious, and are met with in Assyria (1), in Babylonia, and in Persia. The Semitic character of the language is unmistakable (2); indeed, the fulness, antiquity, and syllabic character of its vocabulary and grammar would claim for it the same position among the Semitic tongues that is held by Sanskrit in the Aryan family of speech (3). It has borrowed its syllabary from the primitive Turanian inhabitants of Chaldæa; and this, though not without grave inconveniences, has yet had the fortunate result of preserving the vocalic pronunciation of the Assyrians. Every character is syllabic, as in Æthiopic.

The Semitic dialects to which the Assyrian shows most affinity are the Hebrew and Phœnician. It agrees with these in its preservation of the sibilants (4), which are not changed as in

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Aramaic, in its fuller expression of the vowels (5), in its want of an Emphatic State, in its construct plural, in the forms of the personal pronouns, in the possession of a Niphal, and in the general character of its vocabulary (6). Next to Hebrew, it has most affinities with Arabic. Like the latter, it retains the primitive case-endings of the nouns, though these in the later inscriptions have begun to lose their strict value (7), and agrees with it in the variously modified forms of the imperfect (8), in the use of the participle (9), in the conjugations (10), in the possession of a dual by the verb, in the *mimnation* which replaces (as in Himyaritic) the Arabic *nunnation*, in the simplicity of the vocalic system, and in the formation of the precativè (11). It does not possess, however, any broken plurals (12). Its points of resemblance to the Æthiopic are not so great as might have been expected from the similar position of the two languages—outposts, as it were, of the Semitic family, in constant contact with non-Semitic populations, whom they had dispossessed of their former country, and using a syllabic mode of writing which ran from left to right. Like the Æthiopic, the Assyrian has split up its imperfect into two tenses (13), has chosen the guttural form of the first personal pronoun in the Permansive tense (14), has no article, has borrowed many foreign roots (15), and has adopted several peculiar prepositions (16).

Of all the branches of the Semitic family, the Aramaic is furthest removed from the Assyrian. In the one the vowel-system is very meagre, in the other it is correspondingly simple and full (17). They stand in much the same relation to one another that the Sanskrit does to the Latin. The only points of likeness are the existence of a shaphel and an aphel (18),

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the use of *ana* with the accusative as ܐܢܝ in Aramaic (compare 2 Chron. xvii. 5; Ezr. viii. 16), and the formation of the precativē. Peculiar to the Assyrian is the change of a sibilant into a liquid before a dental (19), as well as the form of the third personal pronoun,—which is, however, met with in South Arabic (20); the extended use of the secondary conjugations with an inserted dental (21), the division of the imperfect into an aorist, present, and future (22), and the adverbial ending (23).

The Assyrians seem to have dispossessed the Turanian population of their cities and country in the sixteenth century B.C. (24), and the oldest inscriptions which we have written in the language are two or three centuries later. The original home of the Semitic people was apparently Arabia (25), whence the northern branch moved into Palestine, and then into Mesopotamia and Assyria. About B.C. 1270 (26), under the name of ܢܫܪܝܡ (= Assyrian *casidi*, “conquerors”) (27), the Assyrian Semites took possession of Babylonia, subduing the Sumiri (? ܫܢܥܝܪ) or Cassi (Cush), and the Accadi or “highlanders,” the inventors of the cuneiform system of writing, who claimed kindred with the Turanian Elamites. A peaceful Semitic population had already been settled in Chaldæa for some centuries, in subordination to the dominant Turanian race. One of the first Babylonian Semitic inscriptions of which we know belongs to Khammurabi (? Semiramis) (28), and records the construction of the Nahr-Malka, the great canal of Babylon, whose two towers were called after the names of the king’s father and mother. The Assyrian and Babylonian dialects differed in several respects. Thus the Assyrian *p* becomes *b* in the Southern dialect (*e.g.*

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Sardanapalus and Merodach-Baladan, *u-se-pi-sa* Assyrian, and *u-se-bi-s* Babylonian, *episu* Assyrian, and *ebisu* Babylonian); *s* becomes *sh* (compare *בלשאצר* and *סרגון*, like the sharper pronunciation of the northern Ephraimites, Judg. xii. 6); *k* is changed into *c* and *g* (as in *katu* "hand" Assyrian, *gatu* Babylonian, *sanaku* "chain" Assyrian, *sanagam* Babylonian); *y* sometimes replaces *ʾ* (ʾ), e.g. *ri-e-su* for *ri-ʾi-su* "head," *er-zi-tiv* for *ir-tsi-tiv* "earth," which is also an instance of the interchange of *y* and *ʾ*; *i* represents the third person singular and plural aorist Kal of verbs *yʾ* in Babylonian, while in Assyrian the first and third persons are identical (beginning with *e*); *lu* is used before substantives as in vulgar Assyrian; and generally the Babylonian presents us with a much greater fulness of vowel-sounds, and has a preference for the mimmatum.

The Assyrian itself varies slightly in the oldest and the latest inscriptions (29). Thus *Nabiuv* became *Nabuv*, and Assur-bani-pal's inscriptions present us with such grammatical irregularities as *sal-la-ti* ("spoil") for *sal-la-at*, and *ic-su-du* for the dual *ic-su-da*. The doubling of letters is frequently omitted (30). Masculine verbs are even found with feminine nouns, e.g. *Istaru yu-sap-ri* "Istar disclosed." The language also in the mouths of the common people was to some extent corrupted, and these corruptions may occasionally be detected in private tablets, and even in the royal inscriptions. Dr. Oppert instances *kham-sa* by the side of *khan-sa* "five"; and we may add *e-rab-bi* for *i-rab-bi* or *i-rab-bi-u*, *ippalaccita* for *ippalcita*, *i-ta-tsu* for *it-ti-si*, *sa* used without any antecedent, as in *ina sa Gar-ga-mis* for *ina mana sa*, "according to the standard of Carchemish," *umma*, "thus" "that," inserted

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as in Greek before quotations, and on Michaux's stone and elsewhere *irin*, "he gave," for *idin* (*iddin*). In Assur-bani-pal's inscriptions *umma* is generally preceded by *ciham*. The contract tablets also offer us examples of the change of *u* to *i*, as *iddini* for *iddinu* (31). In the Persian period the Assyrian experienced considerable changes. New words were introduced, such as *birid* "among," *uku* ("people," Accadian originally), *hagā*, *hagāta*, *haganet* "this," "these" (which, prefixed to the personal pronouns, and the demonstrative, passes into an article—compare too *aganet mati* "these lands"); *ul* is used with nouns and pronouns instead of *la*; and an Aryan order of words even is followed, as in *Kam-bu-zi-ya mi-tu-tu ra-man-ni-su mi-i-ti*, "Cambyses by the death of himself dead." The same cause seems to have produced such ungrammatical sentences as *istin in itehme madu'utu*, or even *istin itehme madūtu* and *madutu in itahime* (!), "one among many law-givers" (32).

1. *Assur* was originally the name of the primitive capital of the country, now called Kileh-Shergat. It was of Turanian origin, and the name is explained in the bilingual tablets as compounded of *a* (= *mie*, מֵיָם) and *usar* (= *siddu*, שִׁדּוּ). Two or three brick-legends belonging to its early Turanian princes, called *pates'is*, are in our possession. They are placed in the nineteenth century B.C., by a chronological reference in the inscription of Tiglath-Pileser I.

2. Had scholars not been prejudiced, this might have been concluded from the few Assyrian words preserved in the Bible or classical writers, viz., *Rab-shakeh*, *Rab-saris*, רַב־שָׁכֶה, רַב־סָרִיס, *Belus*, *Zab* (= λύκος), *Zabate* ("caprea"), and Pliny's *Narraga* or (*N*)*ar-malcha* (= "flumen regium") mentioned above. And see Is. xxxiii. 19.

3. The Assyrian would take this rank as furnishing us with some of the earliest examples of Semitic literature. The simplicity of its vowel-system evidences its antiquity, as well as its so-called case-terminations, which are identical with those of the aorist. The Semitic languages have marked their decay by modifications of the three primitive vowels, which alone

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appear in Assyrian and classical Arabic. The large number of conjugations preserved in Assyrian, as well as the form of the third personal pronoun and the first person singular of the Permansive, are archaic. So also is the mimmation and the use of shaphel. Lastly, the vocabulary is extremely large, and it is unfortunate that we have to explain Assyrian from Hebrew and not Hebrew from Assyrian. Obscure points in Hebrew lexicography have already been cleared up (*e.g.* עֶשְׂתִּי עֶשֶׂר has been explained by Dr. Oppert as Assyrian *istin*, "one," masculine). Even in the Persian period we get *u-ta-h-ma* or *i-le-h-e-me*, "lawgiver," from טַעַם, formed by the prefix *u* or *i*, traces of which are to be found in such Hebrew proper names as יַעֲקֹב, יִצְחָק, or the Arabic يَرْبُوع.

4. The following table will show this clearly:—

ASSYRIAN.	HEBREW.	ARABIC.	ARAMAIC.	ÆTHIOPIC.
ש	ש	ث, س, ش	ת, ש, ס	s, ś
ס	ס	ש, ס	ס	s, ś
צ	צ	ظ, ض, ص	ע, מ, ין	ts
ז	ז	ذ, ز	ד, ז	z

Thus Assyrian *Sal-si* = שַׁלְשִׁי, Arabic ثَلَاث, Aramaic תלת, Æthiopic *s'alastu*; Assyrian *irtsituv* = אִרְסִיטוּב, Aramaic ארע; Assyrian *tsalulu* = צַלְלָל, Arabic ظلل, Aramaic טלל, Æthiopic *tsalala*; Assyrian *zicaru* = זִכָּר, Arabic ذَكَر, Aramaic דכר, Æthiopic *zacara*.

The Assyrian *ś*, however, frequently replaces *s* both in Hebrew and in Assyrian itself, especially where Hebrew has ש; *e.g.* *śiba'* and *siba'*, "seven," *śarru* = שָׂרָא, *ś'amū* = שְׁמוֹנָה.

5. *E.g.* *Catim* = קַטִּימ, Aramaic *k'bal*.

6. Thus we have *nadinu* (נָדִין) instead of Aramaic *y'hab, ḏdu* (בּוֹא) instead of *'atah, radu* (יָדָא) for *n'khat*, etc. So בּוֹן, as in Hebrew, = "to establish:" it has not passed, as in Arabic, Æthiopic, and Phœnician, into the general idea of "existence." The inserted ר is absent, as in Hebrew; *e.g.* *cussu* = כֹּסֶס, in Phœnician כֹּרְסִי, Aramaic *corsai*, Syriac *curs'ya*, Arabic *curs'ya*.

Assyrian differs from Hebrew chiefly in its rare use of the perfect and *waw conversivum*, its want of an article (except perhaps in the Achæmenian period), its plural, its extended use of the secondary conjugations, its substitution of *paal* for *piel*, and its want of the inseparable preposi-

tions, and (except in the later inscriptions) of the accusative prefix. The feminine always ends in *t* (like classical Arabic, Æthiopic, and Phœnician) both in noun and verb. With Hebrew must be classed Phœnician and Moabite (as found in the inscriptions of Mesha). Phœnician agrees with Assyrian in the scanty use of an article and of *waw conversivum*, in the use of the participle for tenses, in the substitution of the relative *š* for *š* (as in the northern dialect of Judges and Canticles), and in the older form of the feminine suffix *ṭ* for *ḥ*. In most cases, however, where Phœnician and Hebrew differ, Assyrian agrees with the latter; e.g., *raglu* "foot," not פֶּעַם, *dhabu* "good," not נָעַם, *sani* "years," not שָׁנוֹת, *nadinu*, not יָתָּ. In many instances the Assyrian employs words common in Phœnician, but poetical in Hebrew, e.g., *pilu* = פֶּעַל (Hebrew usually עָשָׂה), *alpu* = אָלַף (Hebrew usually שָׁוַר), *arkhu* = יָרַח (Hebrew usually הִדְרִישׁ).

It often happens that the Assyrian agrees only with the poetical (archaic) words and forms of the Hebrew, e.g., חָזַז (Assyrian *khazzu*), the plural in יִי, the sparing use of the article and the accusative prefix אֶת, and the lengthened form of the pronoun-suffixes לוֹ, etc., which preserve the final *-u* of the Assyrian (*sunu*).

7. The syllabaries carefully give the typical form in *u* or *um*, but we find in the inscriptions numberless instances of a wrong use, more especially of the oblique cases. Thus, Assur-bani-pal has *pu-lukh-tu* for *pu-lukh-ti*, *di-e-ni* for *di-e-nu*, *libba* for *libbu*; while in Babylonian inscriptions we even meet with such instances as *ana da-ai-nuṣ tsi-i-ri*, "to the supreme judge," for *ana da-ai-na tsi-i-ra*; and the astrological tablets have *khibi essu*, "recent lacuna."

8. These also are liable to be interchanged in the later inscriptions: e.g. in Assur-bani-pal we have indifferently *as-lu-lu* and *as-lu-la*, "I carried away;" *is-ta-nap-pa-ra* and *is-ta-nap-pa-ru*, "I wished to be sent forth;" though perhaps *a* stands here for *u-a* (*wa*), as in *aslula*, "They carried away."

9. More properly, verbal adjectives, as in Arabic, one denoting the agent (e.g., *malicu*, "ruling;" *asibut*, "habitantes;" *dūcu*, "slaying;" *limattu*, for *limantu*, "she who injures;" *limuttu*, for *limuntu*, "she who is injured;" *dīcu*, "slain"). The participles of the conjugations (Kal excepted) are formed by the prefix *mu*.

10. The Assyrian possessed a passive for every conjugation (except Kal, which used Niphal instead), formed as in Arabic; e.g., in the Pael, *sar-ra-ap*, "to burn," *sur-ru-up*, "to be burnt."

Every conjugation, again, had a secondary one (intensive), formed by

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the insertion of *t*, as in the Arabic eighth conjugation. So also the nasal Assyrian conjugation (e.g. *istanappar*) may be compared with the Arabic fourteenth and fifteenth. In Moabite we find an *ifta'ala* (for Niphal) הִלְתָּחַם, infinitive הִלְתָּחֻם, imperfect הִלְתָּחַם, imperative הִלְתָּחֻם.

11. The precativum formed by the prefix *l* is compared by Dr. Oppert with the Arabic precativum prefix ل, the ל of the Talmud, and with the Aramaic forms לְהַיָּי, לְהַיָּי. But it is better to regard these last as equivalent to the usual preformative of the imperfect 'l, with the intensive particle *lu* prefixed. This has been united with the verb, causing the elision of the person-determinative, and in Syriac has been corrupted into *n*.

12. Broken plurals are a later formation in the Semitic languages, and were originally merely singular nouns of multitude. In Himjaritic the Arabic plural *actab* occurs by the side of the ordinary plural (e.g., *sheb*, "tribe," plural *ashúb*). Broken plurals, common in Æthiopic, have become the rule in Arabic. As in Hebrew and Aramaic, there are no certain traces of them in Assyrian. Dr. Hincks believed he had detected two or three: *balu*, plural of *ablu*, "son" (but this word means "power"), *rid*, plural of *ardu*, "servant" (but *rid* is singular referring to Assur-izir-pal, explained as equivalent to *mil-cu* (מִלְכֻּ) and *admu* (אֲדָמָ) ii., 30.3; like *li-du* by the side of *a-lit-tuv*, ii. 36.2.), *ri-i-mu*, plural of *ar-mi*, "bull" (but this explanation of *ar-mi* is doubtful), and *ni-si* from *anis* (but the latter word is not found). Assyrian differs from the Arabic chiefly in its consonantal system (besides agreeing with Hebrew in the sibilants, it does not possess the modern Arabic modifications غ, ذ, ض); in its want of an article (אלקוי is *alu Kus* or *Kis*, "the town of Kis" in Babylonia); in its want of auxiliary tenses; and in its vocabulary (e.g., *mā* in Arabic, as in Syriac, is negative, in Assyrian only interrogative).

13. This will be proved further on. The Assyrian present *igabbir* or *igabir* answers exactly to what Ludolf calls the present in Æthiopic *yēgabēr*, and the aorist *igbur* (or *igbar*) to his subjunctive *yēgbar*.

14. Assyrian *gabracu* or *gabrac* stands side by side with the Æthiopic *gabarcu*. So in Mahri (*zegidek*, "I strike") and Amharic (*zagadhu*). In the second person, however, the Assyrian has the *t* of the other dialects (*gabirta*, *gabirti*), herein departing from the Æthiopic and Mahri, as well as the Samaritan. The *ṭ* seems more original than *t* when we compare the substantive suffixes throughout the Semitic dialects, and the absolute form of the first personal pronoun (Assyrian *anacu*, where *ana* is explained by the root אָנָה). For the change of *t* and *ṭ*, conf. אָנָה and

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שָׁקָה. It appears to belong to the oldest period of the languages. The inhabitants of Raïma near Zebîd still say *kunk* for *kunt*.¹ Assyrian agrees also with Æthiopic and Himyaritic in one of the forms for the plural—*ānu* (*ān*); as well as in forming many adverbs by means of the accusative affix *a* (as also Arabic), e.g., *bazza*, “as rubbish,” *be-'e-la*, “much.” So, too, we find such forms as *manzazu*, “fixed,” like Æthiopic *maf'rey*, “fruitful,” where Arabic has *u*, and Hebrew and Aramaic *shewa*. Himyaritic, again, possesses the mimmat, as in the genitive *Marthadim*; and Amharic and Hararic have a nunnated accusative, *ən*, *in*. The Æthiopic *shēmālem* is an old mimmat accusative.

15. Few, if any, are derived from an Aryan source. This is the more strange, as Aryan nations (Medes, Armenians, Tibareni, Comagenians) surrounded them on the north, the people of Van even adopting their mode of writing. Perhaps *urdhu*, given in a tablet as a synonyme of *tilla*, “high,” is the Zend *eredhwa*, etc., but I have never met with the word in inscriptions. *Alicani*-wood, again, one of the trees introduced into Assyria by Tiglath-Pileser I., is possibly אֶלְגִּימִים, Sanskrit *Valgu* (*ka*), “sandal.” On the other hand, a large number of Accadian vocables were borrowed by the Assyrians, after being Semitized. Thus *muq* becomes *muk-ku*, *gal* or *gula gal-lu*, *naga nangu'u*. Though words of more than one syllable have been thus taken, the roots are more commonly monosyllabic; and the proximity of the remote ancestors of the Semitic family to the Turanians of Chaldaea seems to make it probable that a considerable proportion of the monosyllabic radicals common to the Semitic tongues were originally foreign. A curious example of this may be found in *khirat*, *khirtu*, “woman,” a Semitic feminine formation from the Accadian *kharra*, “man” (؟ חר, Syriac *khira*). Some roots, lost in the other dialects, are found in Æthiopic and Assyrian alone: e.g. *basu*, “to exist,” has been well compared by Dr. Oppert with Æthiopic *bisi*, “man.” There are no traces of Egyptian influence unless it be *pirkhu* given as a synonyme of “king,” on a tablet (II. 30., 3). More probably, however, this merely means “a young man” (פרח). *Ammat* (אִמַּת), “cubits,” is Semitic. *Mana* is of Accadian origin, as is shown by the famous law-tablet.

16. *Ana*, *ina*, *assu*, are not less Semitic than *diba* and *soba*. The other Assyrian prepositions are common to the surrounding dialects. *Ana* and *ina* are merely accusative cases used adverbially: *ana* I would derive from אֲנִי, “to be suitable,” and *assu* from the common root *asasu*,

¹ V. Maltzan (Zeitschrift d. D. M. G. 1871, p. 197).

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אִשָּׁש, “establish.” The inseparable prepositions of Hebrew and Arabic are merely contracted forms of roots which bore much the same meaning, ב of בֵּית, ל of לֹוֹה (just as we have כֵּן for כֵּן and כֵּן for כֵּן). In Assyrian also *cima* is contracted into *ci* (e.g., *ci pi*, “according to the tongue”), and *limetu* (לֹוֹה) is also found as *li* (לִי). So, too, before a consonant we sometimes have *an* for *ana*, and *it* for *itti*. Another point of resemblance between Assyrian and Æthiopic is the violent change of sounds usual in both. Thus in Assyrian a sibilant before a dental regularly changes into *l*. So again Æthiopic, Himyaritic, and Mahri, like Assyrian, have no article. *Sunu*, “illi,” may be compared with Himyaritic and Arabic *humu*, Æthiopic *wetomu*, *m* becoming *n*, as in the plural of nouns. *Su*, *sa*, *si*, must be ranged with the Mahri *sé*, “she,” with plural *sén*, and Himyaritic *s*.

17. As already remarked, the consonantal character of Assyrian agrees with Hebrew, not with Aramaic; compare תָּרִין and *sanē*. Mendaite, perhaps, most exhibits the degenerating tendency of Aramaic. In this dialect the three quiescent letters are vowels; and the gutturals are all pronounced as *ā*, as is sometimes the case in Galilee, in the Talmud, in Nabathean, and on the Jewish bowls found at Babylon by Layard. These, it is important to notice, present a complete contrast to the Assyrian, which goes so far as to permit the doubling of *ḥ* as well as of *ḡ*. Assyrian *ḥ*, however, was frequently dropped in writing, and the language resolves the final *ḥ* into *u*, as Aramaic does into *ā*. The guttural sound of *ḡ*, again, was not known, it being always a vowel (thus, עֹוֹה is written *Khazitu*). *Imiru*, however, is not חִמֵּר, but Phœnician אִמֵּר (“lamb”). The numerous contractions and agglutinations of Mendaite are altogether alien to Assyrian. Assyrian, so far as I know, has but one example of the substitution of *n* for the reduplication of a letter, usual in Aramaic and Mendaite. This is the word *pulunge*, “regions,” once used by Sargon; which is, moreover, an Aramaic use of the usual *palgu*, “a canal” (but found also in Phœnician).

This unlikeness of Assyrian to the peculiarities of Aramaic marks it off from the dialects of Yemen (which have an emphatic termination *o*, the Aramaic postfixed vowel, and such words as *bar*, “son”), or the Siniatic inscriptions (which have *bar* and *dī* for the relative pronoun).

The vocabulary, again, is strikingly non-Aramaic (note 6). Thus we find לָקָה instead of קָבַל, and מִלָּךְ rather than שִׁלַּט, *ab-lu* (יָבַל) and *binu* instead of בֵּר. So *admu*, “man,” is found only in Hebrew, Phœnician, and Himyaritic.

Other points of contrast between Assyrian and Aramaic will be the want