



State Archives of Assyria
Bulletin

Volume VIII - Issue 2

1994

SOME REMARKS CONCERNING THE NEOBABYLONIAN TABLETS FROM ŠEḤ-ḤAMAD¹

Michael Heltzer — Haifa

It is difficult to underestimate the historical value of the four cuneiform tablets discovered in 1992 at the excavations of Tell Šeḥ-Ḥamad, the ancient Dūr-Katlimmu, in the city quarter founded in the VIII century B.C. This is the largest archaeological site and ancient settlement on the Lower Ḥābūr. The tablets have also an epigraphic seal impressions². J.N. Postgate presented the publication of the texts, including the autographs³.

The most important features are that the place had the Babylonian administration and that the tablets are dated from the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar II (603 B.C., nos. 1-3) to the 5th year of his rule (600 B.C.). But they are written according to Assyrian documentary formulae and by the script characteristic to Neo-Assyrian times. So, it is clear that the Babylonian rule had been imposed there for a short time, as all authors of the SAAB issue point out.

In our opinion, the text containing the most important historical information is No. 1 (SH92/6349/12). It is a land-sale transaction by Ḥanana to Adad-aplu-iddina. Ḥanana was the son of Bēl-dan, written EN.KAL, which should mean “Bēl is strong”, if we assume that KAL is here **danānu* / *daʿānu*, “to be strong”.

The land is bordering the land plots of: 1) Ya-aḥḥēia; 2) Ḥazaqi-Yau; 3) Katnunu; 4) Amme-yadi²; 5) Adad-idri, son of Kul-ba-yadi-īli; 6) Adad-takal; 7) Adad-milki-ereš, who has to pay a fine; 8) Adad-aplu-iddina, his son, who receives the plot from the son of Bēl-dan; 9) Ḥanana, who is connected with the selling of the land.

Following are the witnesses of the transactions: 10) Sin-naʿid, governor of the city (EN—URU); 11) Šúlmanu-šangu-ušur, the priest (LÚ.SANGA); 12) Sakua, son of

1) All articles in SAAB 7 (1993), pp. 75-150 are quoted only according to the authors and pages.

2) H. Kühne, “Vier spätbabylonische Tontafeln aus Tall Šeḥ Ḥamad, Ost-Syrien”, *ibid.*, pp. 75-107.

3) “The Four ‘Neo-Assyrian’ Tablets from Šeḥ Ḥamad”, *ibid.*, pp. 109-124.

Ḫazalum; 13) Adad-milki-ereš, son of Menase; 14) Dadi-larim, son of Aḫzi-Yau; 15) Amme-yadi², son of Same²-Yau; 16) Masaya, son of Ḫalliši; 17) Nabû-malik, son of Aḫ-ya²; 18) Arbaya, the charioteer (LÚ.A.SIG); 19) Am-dukuru, son of ¹u-[x]-bi²-il; 20) Libluṭu, son of Nabû-šarru-ušur; 21) Aḫu-larim; 22) Manni; 23) Adad-rapi²; 24) Mannu-ka-aḫḫē; 25) Urad-Nabû, the scribe (LÚ.A.BA); 26) Nabutu.

It is possible that the names Nos. 4 and 15 belong to the same person. No. 10 was the imposed governor of the city, possibly a Babylonian, but his name, as F.M. Fales points out⁴, was connected with the Ḫarrān area tradition of the cult of Sîn: thus he also could be a local resident. Therefore, we have to deal here not with 26, but with 25 persons.

We have to note that No. 1 appears also on tablet 3, 25 (in a variant spelling Ya-aḫḫē); no. 5 on tablet 4, 9; no. 10 on tablet 4, 2; no. 11 on 3, 23 and 4, 20; no. 22 on 2, 32; 3, 29; 4,23; no. 25 on 2, 38; 3, 31; 4, 27. This shows once more that all four texts are written in the same district. Therefore, of special interest is Tablet 3, where, defining the limits of the land-plot of 7), the expression “bordering of the land of Elamites” (GAB.DI A.ŠÀ KUR.NIM.MEŠ) is used. The district is far away from Elam, and the only explanation of this is that there were deportees from Elam about half a century before⁵, which were settled there by the Assyrians, according to their military-administrative practice.

In our list of names a number of West-Semitic names appears, which were analyzed by F.M. Fales⁶ and W. Röllig⁷. In our text no. 1 they are the following:

1. Ya-aḫḫē-ya: we accept the interpretation of Fales (p. 149), “where are my brothers?”, and thus the name has to be understood as an Akkadian one.
2. Ḫazaqi-Yau: Hebrew *Ḫizqiyāhū* (Fales, p. 146);
4. Amme-yadi²: general West-Semitic **myd²* (cf. no. 15) (Fales, p. 143);
5. Adad-idri: Aram. *ʿdd²ʿr* (*Hdd²ʿr*) (Fales, p. 140);
Kul-ba-yadi-īli: Aram. *Klbyd²l* (Fales, p. 146);
9. Ḫanana: Aram. endorsement of the tablet *Ḫnn*, West Semitic (Fales, p. 145);
12. Sakua⁸: Aram. (Fales, p. 147);
Ḫazalum: Aram. *Ḫazāʿēl* (*Ḫzʿl*) (Fales, p. 146);

4) “West-Semitic Names in the Šēḫ Ḫamad Texts”, *ibid.*, pp. 139-150.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 100.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 140.

7) “Die aramäischen Beischriften auf den Texten 1 und 3”, *ibid.*, pp. 125-128.

8) Concerning the interchange of the Neo-Assyrian *s* and West-Semitic *š* and vice-versa, cf. A.R. Millard, “Assyrian Royal Names in Biblical Hebrew”, *JSS* 21 (1978), pp. 1-14; E. Lipiński, “La correspondance des sibilantes dans les textes araméens et dans les textes cunéiformes néo-assyriens”, «Quaderni di Semitistica» 5 (1978), p. 210.

13. Adad-milki-ereš: Akkadian-Assyrian;
Menase⁹: hebr. *Mēnaše* (Fales, p. 147);
14. Dadi-larim: West Semitic (Fales p. 144);
Aḥzi-Yau: Hebr. *ʿAḥazyāhū* (Fales, p.142);
15. Amme-yadi²: West-Semitic **ʿmyd²* (cf. above);
Same²-Yau¹⁰: Hebrew *Šēmaʿyāhū* (*Šmʿyhw*) (Fales, p. 148);
16. Masaya: West-Semitic (Fales, p. 147);
Ḥališi: Phoen., Hebr. *Ḥlš*, *Ḥeleš* (Fales, p. 145);
17. Nabû-malik: Akkadian;
Aḥ-ya²: Hebr. *Aḥiyā*, hypocoristicon of *Aḥiyāhū* (but Fales, p. 141, treats the name as West-Semitic in general);
21. Aḥu-larim: West-Semitic in general;
23. Adad-rapi²: West Semitic in general, presumably Aramaic (Fales, p. 141).

Thus, we have among these 13 persons 10 West-Semitic personal names (without nos. 1, 13, 17), but the names of their fathers, where they are written (nos. 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17), are purely West-Semitic and we see here seven personal names. We can say that at least 11 persons were of West-Semitic origin (*i.e.*, almost a half of all the persons); and naturally that they were, as it is the case with the Elamites, deportees or their descendants.

But we can go further. Among these persons, bearing West-Semitic names, no. 2 is a Hebrew Yahwistic name. In four cases (nos. 13, 14, 15, 17) the fathers of the persons bearing West-Semitic names bear purely Hebrew names. Additionally, such names as *Ḥnn* (no. 9) and *Ḥlš* (no. 16) can be understood as hypocoristic Hebrew or Aramaean names, and we can assume that at least one of these two names had its Hebrew origin. Thus we can take the figure *six* as the number of persons of Hebrew origin. This makes at least one quarter of all persons mentioned in the text — without the officials. We receive here evidence that Israelites or Judaeans were deported to this place by the Assyrians and not by the Babylonians, for in the year 603 B.C. the Neo-Babylonian kingdom did not reach any territory in Judah. We see it also from the fact that the fathers of some persons who had Assyrian or West-Semitic Aramaean names had Hebrew names¹¹. This gives us the necessary data to assume that they

⁹) Cf. fn 8, above.

¹⁰) Cf. fn. 8, above.

¹¹) A similar feature appears at the beginning of the IV cent. B.C. in Cyprus, where a certain *Mtn ʿštrt* (a purely Phoenician name) had a father *ʿzryhw*, which is one of the most common Hebrew jahwistic names (M. Heltzer, “Phoenician Epigraphic Evidence about a Jewish Settlement in Kition (Larnaca) in the Achaemenid Period (IV Cent. BCE)”, in *Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici*, II, Roma 1991, pp. 503-509; *id.*, “Epigraphic Evidence Concerning a Jewish Settlement in Kition (Larnaca, Cyprus) in the Achaemenid Period”, *AuOr* 7 (1989), pp. 189-206.

were born quite in the place of their deportation, and also the fact that they had their fields (nos, 1, 2, 9) shows that they or their fathers had to live in the place of the deportation for a considerable time. Naturally, we do not know whether the deportees were the fathers of these persons, and at what age they were at the time of their deportation, or even whether the deportees were their grandfathers.

According to II Kings 17, 6, “In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah and on the Hābūr (*Hābōr*), the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes”. The annals of the kings of Assyria speak only in general lines about the Palestinian deportations, giving only the names of large geographical areas¹² and the scarce documents where the deportees are mentioned are only from the Assyrian heartland, *i.e.* Assur, Nineveh, Kalḫu, Dūr-Šarrukin, Guzana, and some other places¹³.

And here for the first time the biblical passage speaking about the deportation to the Hābūr district meets its confirmation in the Hābūr district Šēḫ-Ḥamad tablets. But we are not convinced that we have to deal in our text with the descendants of the deportation of 721 B.C. We know also about deportees taken to Assyria from Judah at 710 B.C. by Sennacherib, as also about further deportations from the province of Samaria by Esarhaddon (681-669, *Esr.* 4, 1-2) and even Ashurbanipal (669-632, *Esr.* 4, 10)¹⁴.

Taking into account the relatively rapid assimilation of the deportees in the Assyrian empire, we cannot assume that we have to do here with deportees and their descendants from the time of Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal, whose acts of deportation could not happen in this area after the great revolt of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn in 649-648.

The importance of the Šēḫ-Ḥamad texts is not only for the local history of the Hābūr area, but also for the history of the Assyrian deportations, and for the history of Ancient Israel.

¹²) B. Oded, *Mass Deportation and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Wiesbaden 1979, pp. 29 and 116-136.

¹³) R. Zadok, *The Jews in Babylonia during the Chaldaean and Achaemenian Periods*, Haifa 1979; concerning the deportees in Assyria, pp. 35-38; *id.*, “Sources Relating to Israelite Exiles in Assyria”, “Shnaton” 5-6, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 223-225 (in Hebrew).

¹⁴) Cf. also Oded, *cit.*, p. 29.