

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE V.

ON ASSYRIOLOGY, — A CRITICISM.

[WITH EDITORIAL NOTE AND REPLY.]

In the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for July 1877 there appears an Article "On Assyriology," which is translated from the German of Professor de Lagarde, and published in this country at his own suggestion. The author, we are told, is "one of the leading Semitic scholars of the world, one whose knowledge of Syriac especially, and whose work in applying to the Semitic family of languages the same principles as Grimm and others have successfully followed in Indo-European comparative philology, has already given rich promise and rich fruit." With such ample qualifications for Assyrian studies, it is to be regretted that we have not his active co-operation, instead of his discouragement, in constructing the foundations of cuneiform science; but the tendency of the Article referred to, if not also its intent, is to discredit the results of cuneiform research, and to create doubts respecting their reliability. Already in Germany, as it appears, these attempts to discredit Assyriology are receiving the notice of Dr. E. Schrader; and we can safely trust the defence to his hands, so far as Germany is concerned. But why should Professor de Lagarde seek to forestall public opinion in America, where cuneiform studies have so few defenders, and need most of all encouragement, instead of detraction? Whatever might be the reply to such an inquiry, there are certain points in the "review" to which allusion is made that merit a particular notice; and it is proposed to submit a few remarks upon them.

1st. Upon the necessary qualifications for a successful study of the cuneiform texts. This is not the first time it has been claimed, or at least strongly implied, that a thorough ac-

quaintance with the entire circle of Semitic tongues is indispensable to success in the treatment of these texts, doubt being thus thrown by implication upon the results of those investigators who have not such knowledge. The simple facts in relation to this point may be briefly stated. For the ordinary study of the inscriptions, with a view to obtain the essential facts, or to translate correctly the great mass of texts, such extensive preparations are not required, although they would afford the student some advantage, and would be, of course, quite convenient. But for the higher purposes of linguistic criticism, and for dealing with many difficult passages, the qualifications before stated would be necessary. It would be very much the same with Hebrew, Syriac, or Arabic texts, with the exception that the Assyrian has not been so thoroughly studied, and thus the difficulties would oftener occur. I might illustrate here by the legend of the "Descent of Ishtar into Hades." This was at first a more difficult text to handle than is usual to find; and the earlier efforts at rendering it were crude, and fully realized as such. But to-day the general sense is well understood, and the recent versions agree substantially, except in regard to certain very dark passages. In so far, the results are fully reliable; and where they are not no pretence is made that they are. But this text is exceptional, as compared with the majority, which require no such labor to translate them, and no extensive knowledge of the cognate tongues.

2d. Upon the reading of names of persons, places, etc. It is to be admitted that here are many difficulties and many liabilities to error. But it is difficult to see that the general Semitic scholar, in reading these names, would have much advantage over another student. The difficulties are not so much linguistic, properly speaking, as paleographic. They are mostly due to ideography and polyphony. The author of the "review" alluded to offers a good illustration, except that he has fallen into more or less errors, thus: If the names "*Tigris*, *Babylon*, *Nabuchodnosar* are expressed by groups of signs which at other times are read *Bartikgar*, *Sintirki*, *Anapasa-*

duis, then this arrangement must have had a cause somewhere, although it seems to us, at first sight, like the work of insane persons."¹ It is evident the writer of the foregoing is not a specialist in cuneiform studies; for the mistakes he makes no one familiar with the texts would be likely to do. In the first place, *Sintirki* should be *Din-tir-ki*.² Then, again, the writer is under the impression that *Din-tir-ki* is only another reading of the signs whose Assyrian value is *Bab-il-ki*, or "Babylon"; but such is not the case. *Din-tir-ki* is an old mystical name of Babylon, is quite a different word from *Bab-il-ki*, and written with wholly different signs. The Accadian reading of the signs *Bab-il-ki* would be *Ká-an-ra-ki*; but they are never read *Dintirki*, between which and *Bab-il-ki*, therefore, there exists no polyphony. The writer has cited a wrong example. But there does exist a polyphony between the Assyrian *Bab-il-ki* [Babylon] and the Accadian *Ká-an-ra-ki*; since these are two readings of the same group of characters. That the Accadian is here the primitive reading appears from the fact, that the sign *ra* is not involved in the Semitic *Bab-il-ki*.

These examples afford a curious instance of ideography, as well as of the utility of cuneiform studies to the biblical scholar. The element *ki* is the determinative of place, city, etc., in each instance. Then *Bab-il* means "gate of Il," Hebrew El; and *Ká-an-ra* means "gate of the god of the deluge"; while *Din-tir-ki* is "city of the root of languages," — as before remarked, an old and mystical name of Babylon, evidently referring to the supposed primitive unity of languages, which was broken up at the Tower of Babel (*Bab-il*), the building of which had been undertaken by those who had migrated directly from the diluvian mount in the East. The significance of changing the name from the "gate of the god of the deluge" to the "gate of Il," or El, is found in the fact that, according to Berosus, the god of the deluge was

¹ Bibliotheca Sacra, p. 567.

² *Sintirki* is a mistake in our printing. Prof. De Lagarde's own publication reads *Dintirki*. — ED.

thought to be El. The reference of these names to the events recorded by Moses cannot be doubted.

The author of the "review" labors under an erroneous impression, likewise, as regards the name *Tigris*, of which he assumes *Bar-tig-gar* as a polyphone, which is not the case. The signs *Bar-tik-gar* never have the phonetic value of *Tigris*; but the river whose cuneiform name is often written *Bar-tig-gar*, is known to be the *Tigris*, and is thus so called in rendering the texts. Thus, in this instance, also, a wrong example is cited.

In the case of the name *Nabuchodnosar*, the author of the "review" has hit upon a proper illustration of polyphony, except that no cuneiform student would ever mistake *Anapa-sadusis* for the true reading of this name. It is written quite diversely in the texts, but the true reading is never a matter of difficulty. In any event, the general Semitic scholar would have here no advantage over another less accomplished student. What is above all necessary is a careful study of the texts themselves, which afford abundant guidance. In this name, the element *Nabu* is the Assyrian title of the god Mercury, usually preceded by the determinative of divinity, the Accadian *An*. This element is often written phonetically with the two signs *na* and *bu*; but as frequently with one or the other of the two Accadian monograms for Mercury, which are the signs *ak* and *pa*. Under such circumstances the phonetics *na* and *bu* direct what the reading of *ak* or *pa* should be, when employed in writing this name. The same principles would guide us, in the absence of other knowledge, to the true reading of the name *Bab-il-ki*, or Babylon, which is often written phonetically with the signs *ba-bi-lu*.

From the foregoing remarks and practical illustrations, it will be seen that what is most essential to reliability of results is a patient study of the texts themselves, which afford sufficient guidance in the majority of instances. Even a critical knowledge of the various Semitic tongues would not give one any marked advantage; for the difficulties are not so much linguistic as paleographic. Nevertheless, it cannot

be denied, nor has it ever been questioned, that such a knowledge is absolutely essential in dealing with the Assyrian language itself, and with many difficult texts. That to which objection is here made, is the tendency to magnify the difficulties and uncertainties in cuneiform researches, and to over-estimate the value and necessity of general Semitic scholarship in such studies; especially to detract from the labors of those devoted to these studies. O. D. MILLER.

EDITORIAL NOTE AND REPLY.

[We are glad that Prof. de Lagarde's Article gained so much attention. We are glad, too, that the critic thoroughly agrees with him in insisting that for scientific study of Assyriology full Semitic philological equipment is indispensable. Of course, such careful scientific study is the only study that can be of any service to the careful scientific investigators in other fields. Especially is it such accurate study only which is of any use to theology. The fitness that a plea for such care should appear in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* is evident. On Prof. de Lagarde's informing us that the following confirmatory Article by Prof. Nöldeke of Strasburg, and another Article by Nöldeke on the subject, which we hope to publish, are all the reply he deems necessary to the critic, we publish this Article. Perhaps it is not necessary to inform any Semitic scholar in America who Prof. Nöldeke is.

The importance of "study of texts" emphasized by the critic is not only great, but becomes a serious additional cause of doubt as to the value of decipherings, so long as Smith's opinion holds good, that the texts must be studied on the slabs themselves, day after day, year after year.

The following Article by Prof. Nöldeke appeared in the *Leipziger Literarisches Centralblatt* for Aug. 12, 1876, No. 33, Art. 1. It was a review of Prof. Alfr. v. Gutschmid's "New Contributions to the History of the Ancient Orient. Assyriology in Germany."¹]

In a discussion of the latest edition of Duncker's *Ancient History*, Gutschmid had complained that the book made too extensive use of the supposed results of attempts to decipher the cuneiform inscriptions. He had shown that Assyriologists displayed far greater assurance than they could rightly lay claim to; and he had given a number of instances in

¹ Prof. Alfr. v. Gutschmid, *Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Orients. Die Assyriologie in Deutschland.* Leipzig, 1876. Teubner, pp. 158. l. 8vo. 4 Mk.

which their assertions were flatly contradicted, either by known facts, or at least by very probable propositions; or where they contained decided nonsense. He had, therefore, recommended historians to be extremely cautious in the meanwhile in regard to these results. This censure on Assyriologists was expressed at times rather keenly; and of course was not aimed altogether at Schrader, Duncker's chief authority, but certainly, in the main, at him. Schrader was the first to claim for Assyriology in Germany the rank of a science. It was much to be desired that Schrader should restrain his sensitiveness, and take a lesson from the earnest counsel which this criticism contained. Especially should he have seen what a mistake it is to seize on temporary expedients for overcoming objections and other difficulties, instead of acknowledging that for a time, at least, numberless riddles must remain unsolved. Instead of this he published an explanation replying to Gutschmid, whose strength in his own particular subject he must have known; and in it — rather condescendingly, as at times he can write — he tried to refute Gutschmid's objections. This explanation would have helped him little in the eyes of calm judges, even if he had proved Gutschmid wrong in one or another proposition; for in the main point he could not succeed; that is to say, he could not answer the charge of undue haste and unmethodical procedure in the historical valuation of the inscriptions.

Gutschmid now felt himself obliged to substantiate his objections fully in a separate pamphlet. It is this pamphlet which now lies before us. For the sake of perfect clearness Gutschmid has reprinted in full the part in question of his criticism of Duncker's book, as well as Schrader's reply. Of this reply there then remains not one stone upon another. The few points respecting which Schrader justifies himself, are those on which he was not at all attacked. Gutschmid's review is cutting, and often bitingly ironical, but with the exception of one unfortunate expression on page fifty-six, it keeps within the limits of parliamentary language. In respect

of the facts at issue, however, the opponents are crushed. It is shown, for instance, among other things, how for the sake of their interpretations, they ignore distinct facts of history, of historical and physical geography, and zoölogical geography, too, as well as technical chronology; how they set little value on important testimony of Greek writers and of the Old Testament; and how they overrate for purposes of historical evidence the character of such Assyrian writings as they themselves know to contain many errors.

The difficulty of deciphering the Assyrian cuneiform character is very great, as Gutschmid here once more shows. Present reviewer knows no other kind of writing which can even be likened to it for confusion. Compared with it, Arabic texts without the diacritic points, or Pehlevi books are easy to read; for we know the languages themselves. Even the riddles of the hieroglyphics are nothing when compared with Assyrian; and by interpretation of these hieroglyphics the way has been opened up for reading the more difficult sorts of Egyptian writing. But in Assyrian perhaps every character can be read in more than one way. According to Smith,¹ one character may have thirteen, fifteen, even twenty-seven different meanings. Here is a language, in one respect quite Semitic, yet showing so many peculiarities, even at times seeming so utterly lawless, that the thought rises again and again, such a language can never have been actually spoken. In Assyrian there is certainly more darkness than the acuteness and knowledge of a few investigators can throw light upon in a short time. And the syllabaries, even incomplete as they are, surely show us clearly how many meanings everything may have, how improbable it is that texts of any considerable length can be fully read, and that with certainty of correctness. Compared with these Assyrian syllabaries how modest is the old Uzwaresh glossary, made for initiating the disciples of the magi into the secrets of their writing, just as the former were probably made for the Assyrian priests' disciples. Generations to

¹ *The Phonetic Values of the Cuneiform Characters.* London, 1871.

come will value very highly the work of those who have made the first successful efforts in this field. The faults and mistakes of these investigators will then be willingly pardoned; but now we cannot so easily overlook them, while we see their direct consequences before us. Joy over what is already known has made men forget too soon how to estimate what is not yet understood. Some dark points did become clear, and then there was an inclination to assume that all had been dark where in fact all had been tolerably clear, and to call everything clear, where all still lay in darkness. An unfortunate mania for hypothesis became infectious. Witness the nonsense talked about the Cushites and Turanians. What strange views even the gifted Oppert is now again bringing forward about a certain Phoenician inscription, and about the nationality of the Medes, on subjects, too, which those who are no Assyriologists can easily examine for themselves. It needs a strong effort to refrain from injustice, and to acknowledge gratefully the lasting service which that decipherer has rendered. Sober criticism by themselves of their own work, recognition of the uncertainty, yes, of the great improbability, of many of these results, is to be found among Assyriologists too seldom. It is impossible that all the qualities and knowledge theoretically necessary for deciphering can be united in any *one* man. But it may be fairly demanded that all Assyriologists should have, e.g. a rather more accurate idea of the history, the geography, and the condition of Western Asia than they commonly do have, and that their ideas of these things should be gained from the study of the real sources of information. It is a fact that Assyriology has often blinded her disciples to things which they must have known before. For example, Schrader strays into a very unhistorical view as to the greatness of the power which the kingdom of Judah had at the time of Uzziah; and he does this in order to explain the meaning of an inscription whose historical explanation is unquestionably a riddle at the best. Again, he makes the king of the great empire of Assyria call the little land of Judah an extensive

territory (K. A. T. 90); and this moreover, although it is easy to see from the Persian text of Behistûn that Sanherib merely called Judah a "distant" land, and did so quite correctly. If one who has been a sober investigator learns to distort thus relations with which he is accurately acquainted, how can we be sure that he will measure correctly things which are wholly in the dark, or at least are so to him.

The reviewer may here be allowed to touch on a point on which Gutschmid is purposely silent. Two years ago, in this periodical,¹ the reviewer expressed in a very mild form his doubts as to the value of the *dilettante* philological treatment of these texts, which have been correctly read, perhaps, so far as the sound is concerned. Schrader soon answered² in an Article which showed that he had not clearly understood the exact aim of the reviewer's Article, and that he had misunderstood several details of it, in some cases in an extraordinary way. A superficial reader might have really thought that all the reviewer's objections were refuted, that some of them had been shown to be purely crotchety. Men who really know Semitic languages think otherwise. It would be easy to point out in Schrader's books dozens of impossible etymologies, and meanings which must appear extremely forced, at least to one who is somewhat at home in the Arabic or Aramaic idioms. Reviewer finds in Schrader a constant effort to translate as if there were a complete connection in sense, where for the present no connected translation is possible. As in historical relations, so in language, there is a desire to know the language, just as there is a desire to know the historical facts more exactly than they can be known; and in order to hide from themselves the fact that some things are unknown, some people do not shrink from the most questionable etymological tricks, and from the use, in a hurried, careless way, of untrustworthy dictionaries. The philologist, like the historian, may use the decipherings of Assyriologists only with the utmost caution. The claim

¹ Leip. Lit. Cent. blatt. 1874, No. 26.

Jena Lit. Ztg. 1874, No. 27.

which appeared lately in this paper¹—viz. that the results of Oppert, Sayce, and Schrader should be used as quite good material in the scientific comparative study of the Semitic languages,—must be, we think, rejected.

Although Gutschmid's pamphlet is essentially polemic and negative, it contains also much careful, positive investigation and many valuable results. We may point, e.g. to the discussion of the origin of the Median empire, which is well elucidated by the analogous rise of the Parthian empire. We may point also to the Excursus on the Assyrian Eponyms, and to many other parts of the work. How rich are the treasures of knowledge which are at the command of our author, how correctly he handles the historical method, and how interestingly he can write, are well known from his former writings. Even historians and philologists who have little or nothing to do with the ancient Orient will find the book very instructive on account of the facts which it communicates, and especially on account of its method, and will find it also for the most part highly attractive reading.

A few more details: We hold decidedly, on the strength of varied and quite independent testimonies, that Phul was an Assyrian king, who ruled for a time in Babylon. Gutschmid's conclusion that he was king over a portion only of the country along the Euphrates above Babylon has not yet fully convinced us. The cultivable land on both sides of the Euphrates above Hît is so narrow that it affords no territory such as we must ascribe to a ruler who interfered so largely as Phul did in the affairs of distant Palestine. However, in any case, the condition of the Assyrian-Babylonian states was at that time very complicated. Some very skilful hypothesis is necessary, if we are to get rid of all difficulty. But we must nevertheless keep in mind that the condition of these countries at the time, e.g. of the Bouides and Hamadanites (10th Cent. A.D.) was at least equally confused.

The view that בן חורר is a translation of the Aramaic בן חורר is sustained by the fact that the LXX, Targum, and Peshito

¹ In 1876, No. 30, p. 988.

do translate the Hebrew בן in this name by "son" without any hesitation, and thus both of the latter get back to בן ירדן. Moreover, the *υἱὸς Ἀδέρ* of the LXX depends on the reading with *r* in Hebrew, not on a corruption of the Greek text. The name of the Syrian bishop (of whom no one will believe that he was named after the old heathen king) was actually written with *d*. This is proved by the Greek orthography *Βαράδορος*.¹ There are thus quite decisive grounds for holding that בן ירדן (with *d*) is the right name, and that its bearer was different from Binidri, or as it is to be read, the king of Imirisu (Is it really "Ass's Tower" [see ABK 325]? That would be a most singular name).

A better geographer than the Assyriologists, namely, Jâqût, confounded two places which they confound; but he made the mistake exactly the converse of theirs. For he confounds *Kamch*, the place from which the country *Κομμαγηνή* likely got its name (see Ibn Chord. 83; Belâdh. 184; and cf. Sprenger's "Post and Travel Routes" 106 f.) with *Kamâch* (Byz. *Κάμαχος, Κάμαχα, Κάμαχη*).

For philological reasons we cannot believe that we have Iranian forms in the names of the princes Kundaspi and Kustaspi (= Vindâspa and Vîstaspa), as Gutschmid thinks we have. Besides, it is very improbable that here in Western Upper Armenia there should have lived pure Iranians, in the strict sense of the term.

In connection with the interesting legends of Moses, we may remark that the same occurs in the Persian heroic legend (see the *Dârâ*). Firdausî locates it on the Euphrates, and even the smearing with pitch is not wanting. Another form of the story, in Ibn Athîr (i. 196), i.e. Tabari, locates it on the Persian Kur, and at Persepolis. Did the story originate in Egypt or in Babylon?

From Arpâd to Samaria is *not* "very much farther" than from Arpâd to Nineve (see p. 118). As the crow flies the distances must be about equal; and the actual journey must have required in each case about the same length of time.

¹ Procop. Pers. ii. 13.

We (reviewer) reckon, according to Arabic geographers, that to Mosul from Haleb, which was about three German miles from Arpâd, was sixteen to seventeen days journey; and it was sixteen days journey from Haleb to Samaria. Any shortened route through Mesopotamia which is not noticed by Arabic itineraries cannot have been suitable for the Assyrian armies. Of course Gutschmid is decidedly right in saying that an expedition from Arpâd to Samaria cannot have been considered a mere insignificant side excursion.

It is not only probable, but it is certain, that *magupati* is the prototype of *môbadh*. The Pehlevi still writes the expression thus, 𐭮𐭲𐭮𐭲. As early as the fourth century it must have been pronounced *môpat*, Syriac ܡܘܦܬ.

Respecting the very correct opinion that the Assyrians were in truth an unspeakably abominable people, we may note that Assyriologists have really thought so too. See, e.g. Maspero's "Hist. anc. des peuples de l'orient," p. 283. By passages like this quoted one he makes up, in some measure, for the many serious faults of his book.

May Gutschmid's book have the effect of making Assyriologists more methodical, less at their ease, and more self-denying; but may it also inspire those who are not Assyriologists with a wholesome distrust of these decipherers. Gutschmid justly considers it a questionable proceeding that the results of these men should be given to the public, and this by authority, too, as if the investigations were completed and closed. The wish to check this authoritative publication, as far as lay in his power, has led him to enter into controversy which must of necessity be aimed chiefly against Schrader. If Gutschmid attacks this Assyriologist more zealously than he attacks others, if he occasionally praises this other man or that for a more correct judgment on some question of detail, still, of course, he by no means considers Schrader to be the weakest of them all. There are several other decipherers who would have afforded Gutschmid far more abundant material for criticism. Th. N.