SOME REMARKS CONCERNING THE NEOBABYLONIAN TABLETS FROM ŠEH-ḤAMAD

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It is difficult to underestimate the historical value of the four cuneiform tablets discovered in 1992 at the excavations of Tell Šeh-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 anepigraphic seal impressions. J.N. Postgate presented the publication of the texts, including the autographs.

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 / da’ānu, “to be strong”.

The land is bordering the land plots of: 1) Ya-aḥḫēa; 2) Ḥazaqi-Yau; 3) Kittanu; 4) Amme-yādi; 5) Adad-idri, son of Kul-ba-yadi-ili; 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-na'id, governor of the city (EN—URU); 11) Šulmanu-šangu-uṣur, the priest (LŪ.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 Šeh Ḥamad, Ost-Syrien", ibid., pp. 75-107.

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 out 4, was connected with the Harrān area tradition of the cult of Sin: 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 Ya­hēhē); 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.ŠĀ 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-ahhē-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. Ḥazaqi-Yau: Hebrew Ḥizqīyāhū (Fales, p. 146);
3. Amme-yadi: general West-Semitic *myd (cf. no. 15) (Fales, p. 143);
4. Adad-idri: Aram. ḫdperse (Ḫdperse) (Fales, p. 140);
5. Kul-ba-yadi-ili: Aram. Klbjds (Fales, p. 146);
9. Ĥanaana: Aram. endorsement of the tablet Ḥnn, West Semitic (Fales, p. 145);
12. Sakua8: Aram. (Fales, p. 147);
Hazalam: Aram. Ḥázâʾēl (Hzʾl) (Fales, p. 146);

4) “West-Semitic Names in the Šēh Ḥamad Texts”, ibid., pp. 139-150.
5) Ibid., p. 100.
6) Ibid., p. 140.

   Menase[9]: hebr. M'naše (Fales, p. 147);
14. Dadi-Iarim: West Semitic (Fales p. 144);
   Āḥzi-Yau: Hebr. Ḫāzyāhū (Fales, p. 142);
15. Amme-yadi[7]: West-Semitic *mydp (cf. above);
   Same[2]-Yau[10]: Hebrew Ṣma'yāhū (Ṣm'yhw) (Fales, p. 148);
16. Masaya: West-Semitic (Fales, p. 147);
   Ḥališi: Phoen., Hebr. Ḥlš, Heles (Fales, p. 145);
17. Nabū-malik: Akkadian;
   Ab-ya': Hebr. Ḥiyyā, hypocoristic of Ḥiyyāhū (but Fales, p. 141, treats the name
   as West-Semitic in general);
21. Abu-Iarim: West-Semitic in general;
23. Adad-rapi[9]: 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, deport­
ees 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 Hmn (no. 9) and Hls (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 Israelisites or Judeaens 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 names[11]. 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 Ṣtrt
    (a purely Phoenician name) had a father Ṣtrḥw, which is one of the most common Hebrew jahwistic
    names (M. Helzer, “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,
    (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
deporation 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
deporation, 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
Halaḥ and on the Ḥābūr (Ḥābōr), 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, Kālḫu, Dūr-Šarrūkin, Guzana, and some other places13.

And here for the first time the biblical passage speaking about the deportation to
the Ḫābūr district meets its confirmation in the Ḫābūr district Šēḥ-Ḥamad tablets. But
we are not convinced that we have to deal in our text with the descendants of the
deporation 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 Šēḥ-Ḥamad texts is not only for the local history of the
Ḫābūr 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",
"Šhnaton" 5-6, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 223-225 (in Hebrew).

14) Cf. also Oded, _cit._, p. 29.