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Pl. 1. A Fragment of a Brick from Ashurbanabal's Library.

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SERIES IN

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A

FRAGMENT

OF

THE BABYLONIAN "DIBBARA" EPIC.

BY

MORRIS JASTROW, JR., PH.D.,

PROFESSOR OF ARABIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

N. D. C. HODGES,

Agent for United States, Canada and England
47 Lafayette Place, New York, N. Y.

MAX NIEMEYER,

Agent for the Continent of Europe
Halle, a. S., Germany.

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A FRAGMENT OF THE BABYLONIAN
"DIBBARA" EPIC.

I.

ASSYRIAN antiquities sometimes encounter a queer fate after reaching America, and are occasionally as effectively buried here as they were before being taken out of the mounds of Mesopotamia. Thus a sculptured and inscribed slab from the palace of King *Ašurnasirbal*, for over thirty years after its arrival in this country, lay stored away in the cellar of a city warehouse, where it appears to have been almost entirely forgotten until it celebrated a second "excavation" a short time ago, and then, by that strange incongruity which so frequently brings precious objects to the wrong places in this country, was deposited in the Pennsylvania Museum of Industrial Arts.¹ Again, in Henry Stevens' *Recollections of Mr. James Lenox*, there will be found a chapter devoted to a recital of the strange fortunes of a dozen *Ašurnasirbal* slabs like the one referred to, and which finally found a resting place, or more correctly speaking, a hiding place, in the basement of the New York Historical Society's building.² One would naturally look for them in the Metropolitan Museum.

The fragment of the brick-shaped tablet which is herewith published has also a history of its own. It was obtained about forty years ago by the American missionary F. H. Williams, the same to whom Yale, Andover³ and other places are indebted for their *Ašurnasirbal* slabs. According to my informant, Mr. Talcott Williams, his father purchased it from an Arab, while riding through the mounds opposite Mosul, shortly after Mr. Layard had begun his remarkable excavations there. The shape

¹ Peters, *Sunday School Times*, May, 1886. "Nineveh in Philadelphia." Since sold to the University of Vermont.

² See Jastrow, *Proc. Amer. Oriental Assoc.*, May, 1889, p. 138.

³ Merrill, *Bibl. Sacra*, 1875, pp. 320-325.

of the tablet, the color of the clay, and the character of the writing, in conjunction with the locality where it was obtained, show conclusively that it must have come from the chambers in the so-called Southwest Palace at Koujunjik, which contained the famous "brick" library of King *Asurbanabal*. Whatever was recovered from this library—some 30,000 tablets and fragments—was sent to the British Museum, and particular interest, therefore, attaches to our little brick as being in all probability the only piece that has found its way to this country, of the collection to which, as is well known, we are indebted for almost all our knowledge of the literature proper of ancient Mesopotamia.¹ The value and character of the fragment, however, were not recognized, and, until it was kindly placed at my disposal by its present owner,² it served simply as an object of curiosity in a private "bric-a-brac" collection. The measurements of the fragment are three and one-half inches long, two inches wide, with one inch in thickness. The color of the clay is a dark red. It has a remarkably smooth surface. The writing, particularly on the obverse, is very clear and beautiful; on the reverse, the scribe, it seems, was pressed for space, and the characters accordingly appear crowded, making the identification in some instances rather difficult. For reasons that will become clear in the course of the article, it is impossible to estimate with accuracy the original dimensions of the tablet. When I received the fragment, the reverse was covered with an incrustation which completely obscured the writing. Finding, upon scratching with a pen-knife, that there were characters beneath the incrustation, I entrusted the brick to the care of Prof. Edgar F. Smith, of the University of Pennsylvania, who, in conjunction with his assist-

¹ See Layard, *Nineveh and Babylon* (second expedition), p. 347 of the Amer. Ed., 1853. Rassam, *Trans. Soc. Bibl. Arch.*, Vol. VII. p. 41. Layard's words with regard to the tablets found in these rooms, that in his opinion they would furnish materials "for the complete decipherment of the cuneiform characters, for an inquiry into the customs and sciences, and, we may perhaps even add, literature of its people," are noteworthy for their prophetic force. That is precisely what *Asurbanabal's* library has done for us.

² The fragment is now the property of Mrs. J. Royce, and I have accordingly numbered it with the initial letters of her name.

ant, Mr. Lee K. Frankel, B.S., submitted the side to a careful chemical treatment.

It proved remarkably successful, and I deemed the experiment of sufficient interest and importance to request Mr. Frankel to give a detailed account of the process, which he very kindly consented to do.¹ A second experiment undertaken with this fragment was the reproduction of the two sides by the Levytype process (Philadelphia). Its superiority to the ordinary photograph will at once be recognized, and I think scholars will generally agree in pronouncing the reproduction in every way satisfactory. The characters can be almost as easily read as on the original, and in some instances stand out in even sharper relief. The only objection to this method of reproducing inscriptions on a large scale is the expense involved, but it is suggested that by taking a wax (or other) impression of the sides of a tablet or cylinder and preparing the plates from this impression, the necessity of making a separate plate for each side will be obviated and the expense correspondingly diminished. At all events, and in view more particularly of Delitzsch's recent remarks on the importance of facsimile reproductions of cuneiform inscriptions,² it will not be regarded as superfluous to have called attention to this admirable process. Apart from this, however, the fragment itself merits the distinction accorded to it, as I hope to show in the course of my article. I begin with a transliteration and translation, and after a commentary on the words and phrases shall proceed to discuss its contents, which a

¹ Published as an appendix to this article. I do not know to what extent chemical cleansing of the kind described by Mr. Frankel is resorted to in the European museums, but in the case of many cuneiform inscriptions, more particularly *Aisurbanabal* tablets that I saw in the British Museum, I am satisfied that much can still be done in this way to render the writing clearer; and the remark applies to tablets in the University of Pennsylvania collection, and I have no doubt to all other collections. The same process, involving the chemical decomposition of sediments attached to the clay, was applied to a second cuneiform inscription—a Babylonian royal cylinder, published by me in the *Zeitschrift fuer Assyriologie*, Vol. IV, pp. 301-323—with similar satisfactory results. Experiments were also made with other specimens, and I wish to express my sincere thanks to Prof. Smith and Mr. Frankel for their interest in this matter and for the trouble to which I put them. To my friend Prof. D. G. Lyon, of Harvard University, I am also indebted for some suggestions in regard to doubtful passages on the tablet.

² Delitzsch and Haupt, *Beitrage zur Assyriologie*, I, p. 185.

giance suffices to reveal as mythological; and I shall finally endeavor to make clear its relation to other mythological specimens of Babylono-Assyrian literature. Incidental to the discussion, I shall touch upon a few general questions regarding the composition and development of some of the prominent Babylonian epics and myths, which, while forming digressions, will not, I trust, be found without value and, in so far as they bear indirectly upon my subject, may be looked upon as essential to an understanding of the position to be accorded to the fragment.

II.

TRANSLITERATION.

Obverse.

u
 al In-mar-ma-ru e-ri-b[ā]
 u-ma-am ša-di-i u-še-ri-d[ā]
 e-ma kib-si
 u-šak-ra-bu
 u-ma-am seri la u
 re-bit ali
 it-ta u-lam-man ma-ḥa-[za (?)]
 a-na šu-bat il [ani limnute (?)]
 [murim] reš limutti
 ekal u
 u-d [am-miḥ (?)]
 ri-gin
 ḥi-i [ti]
 ki-i
 tir (?)

Reverse.

a-ge
 li
 lip-ti ni