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PERCY HANDCOCK, M.A.

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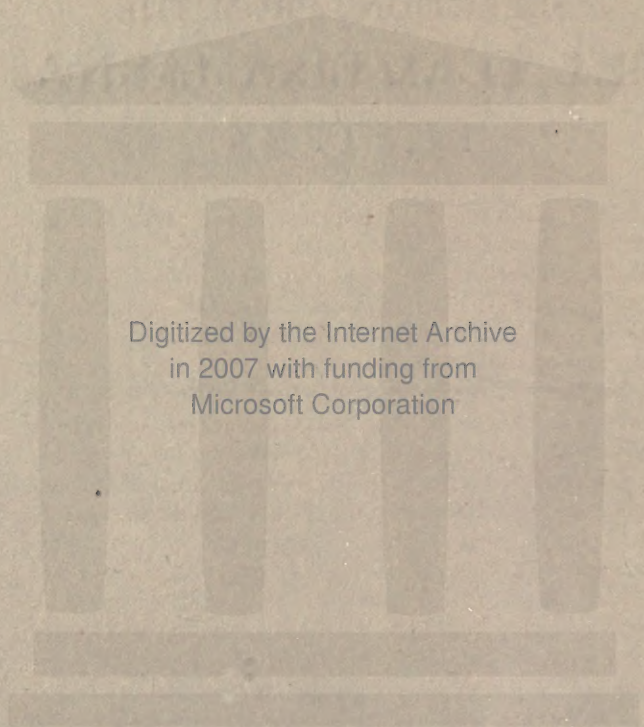
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SELECTIONS FROM THE TELL EL-AMARNA LETTERS

INTRODUCTION

IN 1887, some *fellahin*, digging at a spot called Tell El-Amarna, about 170 miles south of Cairo, the site of Ahetaton (Horizon of Aton), the new capital built by Amenhetep IV. of the Eighteenth Dynasty, in honour of the sun-god, came upon a chamber containing several hundred clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform characters. Unhappily, the value of this discovery was not at the time realised, and a number were carried in sacks to Luxor to be hawked about among the dealers, and were largely broken or damaged on the way. The remainder, some 290, found their way into museums or private collections, and on examination were found to form part of the official archives of Amenhetep III. (c. 1411 B.C.) and his successor, Amenhetep IV. (c. 1375 B.C.), and to consist, for the most part, of letters addressed to these kings by local rulers, and by the independent rulers of the Kingdoms of Western Asia.

The latter, numbering about forty, are mainly from the Kings of Karduniash (*i.e.*, Babylonia), Assyria, the Hittites, the Mitanni, and Alashia (*i.e.*, Cyprus), and are essentially diplomatic in character, the writers' principal object in each case being to preserve friendly relations with the King of Egypt.

The letters from the local rulers in Canaan are of immense value for the history of Syria during the latter part of the fifteenth and the early part of the fourteenth centuries B.C., and reflect the causes and circumstances which led up to the disintegration of the Egyptian Empire in Western Asia. They reveal a country seething with intrigue and faction, which the Egyptian Government was either unable to suppress, or the serious consequences of which it utterly failed to realise.

The trouble partly arose from the activity of the Hittites, an Anatolian people of whom comparatively little is at present known, who were pressing their way into Northern Syria; another contributing cause being the predatory operations of the Ḫabirú in the south, to whom Abdi-ḫiba of Jerusalem refers so frequently, and for protection against whom he implores the King of Egypt so earnestly (see pp. 6, 8 f.).

So far as can be gathered, Abdi-ḫiba, the Governor of Jerusalem, maintained his loyalty to Egypt, but in this respect he appears to have been almost unique. His letters indicate the danger as both widespread and imminent. He entreats the King of Egypt to send troops, and adds that if no troops arrive "this year," all the countries of the king will be utterly destroyed.

The identification of the name Ḫabirú with *Hebrews* has been largely canvassed of late years, and the theory has gained a good deal of support among scholars. Whether this theory will ultimately be substantiated beyond all reasonable doubt or not remains to be seen, but the identification of the Ḫabirú with the Hebrews, who sojourned in Egypt and made good their escape at the Exodus, is very precarious, even assuming the identification of the names, and involves the repudiation of the Biblical tradition which in the main there is no reason to suspect—but every reason, archaeological and otherwise, to accept.

Assuming the identification of the *names*, then the Habirú, or *Hebrews*, mentioned in these letters must refer to tribes which had either stayed behind at the time of the Israelite immigration into Egypt, or else had made their way from Egypt some two hundred years or so before.

One of the tablets, of which a translation is given below (p. 12), is of exceptional interest, as it was found at Lachish, and obviously belongs to the Tell El-Amarna series. Mention is made therein of Zimrida, Governor of Lachish, who in one of the Tell El-Amarna letters professes loyalty to the Egyptian king, and is also referred to in one of Abdi-hiba's letters (see p. 9).

One of the most interesting features about these letters is that they are all written in the cuneiform script, and it is not merely that a Babylonian king himself uses the Babylonian script and language¹ in corresponding with the King of Egypt, but kings of the Mitanni and Cyprus, and the local Egyptian Governors in Palestine, do likewise, which shows clearly that Babylonian was the *lingua franca* of the Near East at that time—a striking testimony to the enduring influence of Babylonian culture in Canaan and the neighbouring countries.

But although written in the Babylonian language, there are sporadic occurrences of Canaanite words, sometimes by themselves, and sometimes added by way of explanation of the Babylonian equivalent, and these Canaanite words are almost identical with Hebrew.

The translations given below in the main follow those of J. A. Knudtzon (*Die El-Amarna Tafeln*), which takes the place of Hugo Winckler's edition (*Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek*, v., 1896) as the standard edition.

P. H.

¹ A Semitic language allied to Hebrew but not identical with it.

*From Abdi-ḥiba of Jerusalem to the King (Berlin, VA.
Th. 1644).¹*

To the king, my lord, hath spoken Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant: At the feet of my lord seven times and seven times do I fall. I have heard all the words which the king, my lord, has sent. . . . [Behold] the deed, which . . . has done . . . what shall I . . . news . . . brought to the city Kilti. Let the king know that all lands have leagued in hostility against me; let the king therefore care for his land. Behold, the territory of Gazri, the territory of Ashkelon, and the city of La[chish], have given them oil, food, and all their necessaries. Let the king therefore care for the troops! Let him send troops against the people who have committed a crime against the king, my lord! If in this year there are troops here, then will the land and the local ruler[s] remain to the king, my lord; but if there are no troops here, then there will remain no lands and no local rulers to the king.

Behold this land of Jerusalem—neither my father nor my mother gave it to me; the mighty hand of the king gave it to me. Behold, this deed is the deed of Milkilu, and the deed of the sons of Labaya, who have given the land of the king to the Ḥabirú. Behold, O king, my lord, I am innocent as regards the Kashi. Let the king ask the officers if the house is very mighty (?). Indeed, they have aspired to perpetrate a very wicked crime; they have taken their implements and . . . sent to the land . . . servant; let the king take heed to them, that they support the lands with their hand. Let the king demand for them much food, much oil, and many garments, until Pauru, the king's officer, goes up to Jerusalem.

¹ Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna*, No. 103. Translated by Winckler, *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek*, V., No. 180; and by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 287.

Adaja is in revolt together with the garrison, the officer . . . the king. Let the king know that Adaja said to me: "Behold, let me depart, but do thou not leave it (the city)." In this year send me a garrison, send the officer of the king. . . . I sent to the king, my lord, 5,000 *asiru* . . . 318 (?) bearers for the caravans of the king; they were taken in the fields of Ajalon. Let the king, my lord, know that I am unable to send caravans to the king, my lord—this for thy information. Behold, the king has set his name in the land of Jerusalem for ever, therefore he cannot leave the land of Jerusalem in the lurch.

To the scribe of the king, my lord, hath spoken Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant: At thy feet I fall. I am thy servant. Bring clearly before the king, my lord, these words. An officer of the king am I. I am. . . . And an evil deed has been done against me by the people of Kash. I was all but slain by the people of Kash in my house. Let the king ask . . . seven times and seven times . . . the king, my lord, to me.

*From Abdi-ḥiba of Jerusalem to the King (Berlin, VA.
Th. 1642).¹*

To the king, my lord, hath spoken Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant: At the feet of my lord, the king, seven times and seven times do I fall. What have I done to the king, my lord? They have slandered me before the king, my lord [saying]: "Abdi-ḥiba has revolted from the king, his lord." Behold, as for me, neither my father nor my mother appointed me in this place. The mighty hand of the king introduced me

¹ Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna*, No. 102. Translated by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 286; and by A. Ungnad in Gressmann, *Allorientalische Texte und Bilder zum Alten Testament*, pp. 132-3.

into my father's house. Why should I commit an offence against the king, my lord? So long as the king, my lord, lives will I say to the officer of the king, my lord: "Why do you like the Ḥabirú and hate the local rulers?" For this reason they slander me before the king, my lord. Because I say: "The territory of the king, my lord, will be ruined," therefore am I slandered before the king, my lord. Let the king, my lord, know that the king, my lord, had established a garrison, but . . . Eenhámu has taken it. . . . Egypt . . . king, my lord . . . there is no garrison there. May the king care for his land! May the king care for his land! The lands of the king, my lord, have all fallen away. Ilimilku is destroying the entire land of the king. May the lord care for his land! I say: "I will go before the king, my lord, and see the eyes of the king, my lord." But the enemies are powerful against me, and I am unable to go before the king, my lord. So may it seem right to the king to send garrison-troops, and I will go and see the eyes of the king, my lord! So long as the king, my lord, lives, when an officer goes forth, I shall say: "The lands of the king, my lord, are going to ruin." But you do not listen to me. All the local governors are lost; there remains not one local governor to the king, my lord.

Let the king turn his face to the troops, and let the king, my lord, send troops! No territory remains to the king, my lord. The Ḥabirú are devastating all the lands of the king. If there be troops in this year, then the lands will remain the king's, my lord's; but if no troops arrive, the lands of the king, my lord, are lost. To the scribe of the king, my lord: Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant. Bring clearly before the king, my lord, [these] words: All the lands of the king, my lord, are going to ruin.

*From Abdi-ḥiba of Jerusalem to the King (Berlin, V.A.
Th. 1643).¹*

To the king, my lord, my sun, hath spoken thus Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant. At the feet of the king, my lord, seven times and seven times do I fall. Behold, the king, my lord, hath set his name upon the East and upon the West. It is a wickedness which they have wrought against me. Behold, I am not a local ruler, I am an officer² of the king, my lord. Behold, I am a shepherd of the king, and one who brings tribute to the king. Neither my father, nor my mother, [but] the mighty hand of the king, hath established me in my father's house . . . came to me. . . . I gave him ten slaves into his hand. When Shûta, the officer of the king, came to me, I gave him twenty-one maidservants and eighty (?) *asiru* . . . gave I into the hand of Shûta, as a present for the king, my lord. Let the king care for his land! The whole land of the king will be lost. They have assumed hostilities against me (?) As far as the territory of Shêri, as far as Ginti-kirmil, it goes well with all the local rulers (?), and hostility prevails against me. If one could see!³ But I do not see the eyes of the king, my lord, because hostility is established against me. When there was a ship on the sea, and the mighty hand of the king held Naḥrima and Kapasi. But now the Ḥabirú hold the cities of the king. There is no local ruler left to the king, my lord; all are lost. Behold, Turbazu has been slain in the gate of Zilû; yet the king does nothing. Behold, Zimrida of Lachish, his servants have slaughtered him . . . the Ḥabirú, Iaptiḥ-Adda, has

¹ Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna*, No. 104. Translated by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 288; and by Ungnad in Gressmann, *Allorientalische Texte und Bilder*, p. 133.

² An Egyptian word.

³ The meaning of this line is very dubious.

been slain in the gate of Zilû ; yet the king does nothing. . . .¹ Let the king take care for his land, and let the king give his attention in regard to troops for the land of tribute (?) ! For if no troops come in this year, all the lands of the king, my lord, will be destroyed and in ruins. They must not say before the king, my lord, that the land of the king, my lord, is destroyed, and all the local rulers are destroyed. If no troops arrive in this year, then let the king send an officer to take me to *thee* with my brothers, and we will die with the king, my lord.

To the scribe of the king, my lord, thus Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant : At thy feet I fall down. Bring these words clearly before the king, my lord. . . . Thy son and thy servant am I.

*From Abdi-ḥiba of Jerusalem to the King (Berlin, VA. Th. 1645).*²

To the king, my lord, *hath spoken* thus, Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant. At the feet of the king, my lord, seven times and seven times I fall. . . . Behold, hath not Milki-lim revolted to Labaya's sons and to Arzaya's, so as to claim the land of the king for them ? A prince who has done this deed—why does not the king call him to account ? Behold Milki-lim and Tagi, the deed which they have done is this : After having taken the city Rubuda, they are now seeking to take Jerusalem. If this land belongs to the king, why (*delay* till) the Ḥazati are at the king's disposal ? Behold the land of Ginti-kirmil belongs to Tagi, and the people of Ginti form a garrison in Bêtsâni ; and the same will befall us now that Labaya and the land of Shakmi have given everything to the Ḥabirû. Milki-lim has written to Tagi and his sons : " As two are . . .³, give to the people of

¹ The meaning of this line is very dubious.

² Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna*, Nos. 105 and 199. Translated by Knudtson, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 289.

³ *mimulat*.

Kilti all their hearts' desire." Shall we, then, let Jerusalem go? The garrison-troops which thou has sent by the hand of Haya, the son of Miarê, hath Addaya taken and placed in his house in Hazati, and twenty men hath he sent to Egypt.

Let the king take heed that there is no garrison of the king with me! Such is the case as the king liveth. Puuru his . . . He has departed from me and is in Hazati. Let the king keep this before him, and let the king send fifty garrison-men to protect his land! The whole land of the king is in revolt. Send Ji'enhamu, and let him take heed for the land of the king.

To the scribe of the king, my lord, thus speaketh Abdi-hiba, thy servant. Bring these words clearly before the king. I am in highest degree . . . to thee, thy servant am I.

From Abdi-hiba of Jerusalem to the King (Berlin, VA. Th. 1646).¹

To the king, my lord, hath spoken thus Abdi-hiba, thy servant: At the feet of the king, seven times and seven times I fall. Behold the deed which Milkilu and Shuardatu have done against the land of the king, my lord. They have . . . the soldiers (or people) of Gazri, the soldiers of Gimti, and the soldiers of Kilti, and have taken the territory of Rubute. The land of the king is lost to the Hjabirú. And now indeed a city of the territory of Jerusalem, called Bêt-Ninib, has been lost to the people of Kilti. Let the king listen to Abdi-hiba, thy servant, and send troops, that I may restore the king's land to the king! But if there are no troops, the land of the king will

¹ Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna*, No. 106. Translated by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 290; and by Ungnad in Gressmann, *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder*, p. 134.

be lost to the Hābirú. This is the deed of . . . Milkilu . . . Shuardatu . . . and let the king take care for his land!

From Abdi-ḥiba of Jerusalem to the King (Berlin, VA. Th. 1601).¹

To the king [my lord, thus hath spoken] Abdi-ḥiba, thy servant. [At] the feet [of the king, my lord], seven times and seven times I fall. Behold, I am not a [local ruler]; an officer am I to the [king, my lord]. Why has the king . . . not sent a messenger . . .? Under such circumstances Eeḥamu has sent. . . . Let the king [hearken] to Abdi-ḥiba, his servant! [Behold], there are no troops. Let the king, my lord, send an officer, and let him take the local rulers with him! The lands of the king . . . and people . . . who are . . . and Addaya, the officer of the king, [has] their house. . . .

Let the king take heed for them, and let him send a messenger quickly When . . . I die. . . .

Letter from Lachish (Constantinople, W. 219).²

[To the] great, thus hath spoken Pabi, at thy feet I fall. Thou must know that Shipti-Ba'al and Zimrida are conspiring, and that Shipti-Ba'al hath spoken to Zimrida: "My father of the city, Yarámi (?) has written to me—Give me [six] bows, and three daggers, and three swords! If I go forth against the land of the king, and thou dost join me, I shall surely conquer. He who makes (?) this plan is

¹ Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna*, No. 174. Translated by Winckler, *Die Thontafeln von Tell El-Amarna (Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek, V.)*, No. 184; and by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 285.

² Published by Hilprecht, *Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*, vol. i., *Old Babylonian Inscriptions*, Part 2, Plate 64, No. 147. Translated by Winckler, *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek, V.*, No. 219; by Ungnad in Gressmann, *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder, I.*, pp 127-8; and by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 333.

Pabu. Send him before me." Now I have sent Rapi-el. He will bring to the great man information about this affair (?)

Letter of Burraburiash to Amenhetep IV. (Berlin, VA. Th. 152).¹

To Naphu'ruria, King of Egypt, my brother, thus hath spoken Burraburiash, King of Karduniash, thy brother: With me it is well; with thee, with thy land, thy house, thy wives, thy children, thy nobles, thy horses, thy chariots, may it be exceeding well! I and my brother have spoken friendly with one another, and thus have we spoken: "As our fathers were, so will we also be good friends." But now my traders, who came up with Aḥutâbu, remained behind in Kinahḥi² for business reasons. After Aḥutâbu had gone off to my brother, in the city of Hinnatuni of Kinahḥi, Shumadda, son of Balummê, and Shutatna, son of Sharâtum, of Acco, sent their men and slew my traders, and carried off their money! Azzu (?) . . . I have sent to thee, so ask him and let him tell thee. Kinahḥi is thy land and its kings are thy servants. In thy land violence has been done me. Chastise them, and the money which they have taken away, restore! And the men who have slain my servants, slay them, and avenge their blood! But if thou dost not slay these people, they will on another occasion slay my caravans or thy messengers, and then messengers will cease to pass between us. And if they deny it, [know this,] that Shumadda cut the feet off one of my people, and kept him prisoner; and that Shutatna of Acco set another on his head, and he stands before his face. Cause these men to be brought before thee, and take heed to my welfare! As

¹ Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna*, No. 8. Translated by Ungnad in Gressmann, *Allorientalische Texte und Bilder*, I., p. 129 f.; and by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, p. 85 f.

² *I.e.*, Canaan.

present I have sent thee one mina of lapis-lazuli. Send my messenger back speedily. May I learn of the welfare of my brother! Do not keep my messenger back! Let him come quickly!

Letter of Tushratta of Mitanni to Amenhetep III. (British Museum, BV. 88-10-13, 78).¹

To Nimmuria, King of Egypt, my brother, my son-in-law whom I love, and who loves me, thus hath spoken Tushratta, King of Mitanni, who loves thee, thy father-in-law: With me it is well. With thee may it be well! With thy house; with Tatuhepa, my daughter, thy wife whom thou lovest, may it be well! With thy wives, thy children, thy nobles, thy chariots, thy horses, thy warriors, thy lands, and with everything that is thine, may it be very, very, very well!

Thus saith Ishtar of Nineveh, the Lady of countries, all of them: "To Egypt, the land which I love, will I go, and I will wander (?)! Behold, now I have sent [her], and she is gone. . . . Behold, in the time of my father did the Lady go to the land, and as, when she formerly dwelt there, men honoured her, so may my brother now honour her ten times more than in the former days! May my brother honour her, and send her away in joy that she may return!

Ishtar, the Lady of Heaven, may she protect my brother and me! One hundred thousand years and much joy may this Lady give us both! And as is good, so will we do. Ishtar is for me, my god; but for my brother, she is not his god.²

¹ Published by Bezold and Budge, *The Tell El-Amarna Tablets in the British Museum* (1892), No. 10. Translated by Ungnad in Gressmann, *Allorientalische Texte und Bilder*, I., p. 130-1; and by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 23.

² The reverse side of this tablet is inscribed with a note of three lines of Egyptian hieroglyphics, written in black ink, and reading:

Letter of Rib-Adda of Byblus (Berlin, VA. Th. 1239).¹

RIB-ḪADDA hath spoken to his lord, the king of the lands, the great king: May Ba'alat of Gubla² give might to the king, my lord! At the feet of my lord, my sun, seven times and seven times I fall. Let the king, my lord, know that Gubla, the true handmaid of the king, is safe, but very strong is the hostility of the Sa Gaz-warriors against me, and may the king, my lord, not hold back from Sumur, lest it entirely joins the Sa Gaz-warriors! By the officer of the king, who was in Sumur, Gubla has been saved. Behold, Paḥamnata, the officer of the king, who is in Sumur, knows the need which oppresses Gubla. From Yarimutta have we procured the means of existence. Very powerful has been the hostility against us. Therefore, may the king not hold back from his cities!

Letter of Rib-Adda of Byblus (British Museum, Bu. 88-10-13, 58).³

RIB ADDA spoke to his lord, the king of the lands, the great king: May Ba'alat of Gubla give might to the king, my lord! At the feet of my lord, my sun, seven times and seven times I fall. Why hast thou sent me no reply, so that I might know the deed which they have done? I

"Year 36, 4th month of the winter, when we were in the southern castle Pr—H'wt . . . Copy . . . brought by the messenger."

¹ Published by Abel and Winckler, *Der Thontafelfund von El-Amarna* (1889-90), No. 80. Translated by Winckler, *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek*, V., No. 88; by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 68; and by Ungnad in Gressmann, *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder*, I., p. 131.

² "Gubla" is the Babylonian for "Byblus."

³ Published by Bezold and Budge, *The Tell El-Amarna Tablets in the British Museum* (1892), No. 14. Translated by Winckler, *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek*, V., No. 61; by Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*, No. 83; and by Ungnad in Gressmann, *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder*, pp. 131-2.

sent my man before my lord, and his two horses were taken, while in regard to another man, the man himself (?) was taken and the king's tablet was not given into the hand of my man.

Listen to me! Why hast thou so held back that thy land should be taken? Let it not be said: "In the days of the overseers the Gaz-people have taken all lands." Let it not be said in (those) days: "And thou art not able to take them again." Further, I have written for garrison-troops, and for horses, but they were not granted. Send a reply to me! Otherwise I shall make alliance with Abdi-Ashirta, like Yapa-Adda and Zimrida, and I shall be saved. Further, if Sumura and Bêt-Arḥa are lost, thou must give to me by the hand of Yanḥamu.¹ Let him give provisions of food for me! I will protect the city of the king for him, and let the king speak the word and send my man! His relations are embittered against me day and night, saying: "Thou hast given our son to the king, and he should send him back." Two men of Inamta are in the house of Yanḥamu. Further, say to Yanḥamu: "Rib-Addi is in thy hands, and everything that is done to him rests upon thee." Let not men of destruction (?) fall upon me! And I have written to him: "If thou dost not say so, then I will abandon the city and depart. Further, if thou sendest me no answer, then I will abandon the city and depart with the men who love me. And know, indeed, Ummaḥnu, and Ishkuru her husband, the servant of Ba'alat of Gubla, and power . . . to Ba'alat."

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