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Representing Pharaoh making offerings to the Gods.

Frontispiece to The Open Court
HAMMURABI AND AMRAPHEL.

BY DR. HUGO RADAU.

[People not familiar with Semitic languages, especially with Hebrew and Babylonian, may very well be puzzled why Hammurabi should be identified with the Biblical Amraphel, and it is quite natural that a correspondent of ours should conceive the ingenious idea of identifying Hammurabi with Abraham. Considering the English transcription alone and neglecting entirely the philology of both Babylonia and Palestine, the identification of Hammurabi and Abraham would be more plausible than that of Hammurabi and Amraphel.

We deemed it wise to submit the question to a specialist, and take pleasure in publishing the answer of Dr. Hugo Radau.—Editor.]

HAMMURABI has been identified with the Biblical Amraphel not without good reason. The arguments which are so strong that scarcely any student of Babylonian inscriptions would doubt them are two-fold; first, historical; secondly, linguistic.

Since the writer of the letter submitted to me is concerned only with the linguistic difficulties of this identification, I shall here omit the weighty historical arguments and limit myself to the latter.

The name Hammurabi may be written in Babylonian either cha-mu ra bi or cha-am-mu-ra-bi.

If we transcribe these syllables in Hebrew script, we would get either

חַמּוֹרָבִי or חַאַרְמּוֹרָבִי

The Biblical name is Amraphel or

חַמּוֹרָל

A comparison shows that only two consonants are common to both names: \(mr = רָל\).

The difficulties of this identification, then, consist in the equation of the
The name Hammurabi is in Babylonian a foreign name, for we have a syllabary in which it is explained by kimtu rapashtu, i.e., “the great or extended family.” The Babylonian scribes, then, saw in this name two elements, one meaning “family,” the other “great.” These two elements are chaamma + raβi.

Hammurabi belongs to the kings of the first dynasty of Babylon, which is of Canaanitish origin. The language of the Canaanites is, as we know now from the Tell Amarna tablets, identical with the Hebrew language. From a comparison of the Canaanitish words to be found in the Amarna tablets with their Babylonian transcription we know that Babylonian cha corresponds.

a. Mostly to Canaanitish ב.

Canaanitish ב (gate) = Babylonian transcription: šachri (םחר).

“חinar (arm) = “ “ zurâch (זרח).

“טיכני (my eyes) = “ “ chinaja (ציינה).

“ךאר (yoke) = “ “ chullu (חול).

“שיבך (Hebrews) = “ “ chabirê (שבר).”

See here also from Assyrian inscriptions:

Hebrew מ (a city, Gen. x. 19) = Assyrian chaziti, chaz(ז)atu, etc.

“שלאב (Omri) = “ “ chumri.

The syllable cha in the name cha-am-mu-ra-bi would correspond therefore to the Canaanitish ב, which means “people,” “tribe,” “family.”

b. But the Babylonians transcribe the Canaanitish resp. Hebrew ב also by a, hence the name ב occurs in the Babylonian resp. Assyrian inscriptions also as Azzatu! If this be true, then we might expect, if the syllable cha be ב, that the name Cham-murabi be also written Ammurabi. Indeed, such a writing does occur. In an Assyrian letter, K. 552, 5 ff., our name is written ammurapi, which when transcribed in Hebrew would become:

�נפ

This writing proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the syllable cha in Chammurabi corresponds to the Canaanitish resp. Hebrew ב, and means “people” or “family” = kimtu. But Gen. xiv. where the name Amraphel occurs is written in Hebrew, why should the Hebrew rendering of this Hebrew Canaanitish name be written with an נ (ץ) instead of an ב (יב)?
The answer is: "The writer of Gen. xiv. had a copy or has seen an inscription where the name was written Ammurabi (as above) instead of Chammurabi."

II. BI = PHEL.

How is the syllable phel instead of bi to be explained? The Babylonian script is a syllabic script, and each syllable or sign is again polyphone, i. e., one sign may be read in several different ways. Now it appears that there is in the Babylonian writing one sign which may be read not only NE but also bi, bil, pil. The writer of Gen. xiv. therefore must have had a copy before him or seen an inscription where this sign was to be found at the end of the name, an inscription where the name was written

AM - MU - RA - PIL,

which he read and which he transcribed in Hebrew by

but which ought to have been read

am-mu-ra-be or am-mu-ra-pi,

and transcribed by

The syllable rab(i) contains the root נב or נב, "to be or become great, extended, numerous," etc., which again is the Canaanitish-Hebrew equivalent of the Babylonian rapashtu or rapaltu. Chammurabi, then, is קים נב =kimtu rapashtu =the great family (people).