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Recent Archeological Light on Nahum.

Those who investigate the harmony that exists between Nahum's prophecy and Nineveh's exit from history will be deeply impressed with the truth that the Old Testament prophets were guided, not by *Ahnungsvermoegen*, that ability to anticipate which keen-minded students of human affairs sometimes show, but by a divinely inspired prophetic genius. The composite picture which secular history draws of the last days of Nineveh shows in many particulars an amazing agreement with Nahum's prophetic delineation.

Until thirteen years ago the chief sources for a comparison of this prophecy and its fulfilment were:—

1. Herodotus (484—425 B. C.). He promises to tell how the Medes captured Nineveh (*History*, I, 106), but does not keep his promise in any of the manuscripts that have survived. He has, however, some significant notes on the fall of Nineveh in I, 103 ff.

2. Xenophon's *Anabasis* (III, 4, 7—12). This was written between 379 and 371 B. C. It codifies early fourth-century, B. C., traditions concerning the downfall of Nineveh and presents Xenophon's own notations at the sight of the ruined city.

3. Diodorus Siculus. He was a contemporary of Julius Caesar and Augustus and apparently wrote after the middle of the first century before Christ. He asserts that he spent thirty years in writing his *Chronicle* and offers perhaps the most detailed and least reliable of the classical historical accounts.

4. In addition, Eusebius in his *Chronicles* has retained snatches of references to relative statements by Alexander Polyhistor (I, 29, 14—19) as well as of Abydenus (*Chronicles*, I, 35, 28—37, 13).

5. In 1923 the British Museum tablet No. 21901 was published in C. J. Gadd's *The Fall of Nineveh*. Although the tablet is not dated, its neo-Babylonian cuneiform characters show that it is part of the considerable chronicle literature that originated in the Achaemenid period (550—330 B. C.). The references pertaining to the fall of Nineveh are partially fragmentary on account of the damage which the tablet has suffered, and even the undamaged sections, written in the annalistic style of the Babylonian Chronicle, contain only meager information with regard to the capture of Nineveh. But summarizing from the year 616 to 609 B. C. events that were of particular importance to the Babylonian writer and reader, this tablet (which definitely dates the fall of Nineveh at 612 and offers invaluable data concerning the preliminary siege of the city and its subsequent destinies) is a historical source of prime importance.

A comparison of Nahum's prophecies with the statements of the sources suggests the following points of contact and agreement:—

I.

Nahum prophesies a long siege before the destruction of the city. Nineveh is ironically directed to store water, to prepare bricks and mortar (rather than hastily thrown-up earthworks) for the construction required by protracted siege (chap. 3, 14).

Diodorus has preserved hazy tradition and writes: "The siege dragged on for two years" and, as he proceeds to show, went into the third year. Until 1923 there was no substantiation for a three-year siege. Some have believed that the "three months occupied by the final siege had been expanded by tradition into three years." Gadd, who suggests this possibility (p. 17), adds, however: "Against this is the intervention of the 'Bactrian' (*i. e.*, Scythian) army, which seems to demand a longer time, and it is therefore probably better to accept the three years as correct, on the understanding that the war was by no means continuous." The Babylonian Chronicle of the fall of Nineveh, in presenting the preliminary attacks against Nineveh, in 614, thus "has a remarkable interest as at least a partial confirmation of the tradition which survives in Diodorus, that the siege of Nineveh extended into the third year" (Gadd, p. 9).

II.

Nahum warns Nineveh that "all thy strongholds shall be like fig-trees with the first-ripe figs; if they shall be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater" (chap. 3, 12), *i. e.*, the many Assyrian fortresses that surround the city shall be captured with ease. The Babylonian Chronicle tablet offers remarkable substantiation for this prophecy in its record for the year 614 B. C. While the capital city sustained the first assaults in that year, the fortified towns in its environs began to fall. The tablet mentions specifically Tarbis, the present-day Sharif Khân, northwest of Nineveh. Whatever fortifications may have been erected in the territory between Nineveh and Ashur must have fallen quickly; for in the same year Ashur was speedily and apparently easily destroyed.

III.

Describing the final chapter in Nineveh's history, the prophet predicts that "while they [the Ninevites] are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured" (chap. 1, 10). Herodotus (I, 106) has a story of defeat through drunken debauch in the day of Cyaxares, immediately before the fall of Nineveh. But Diodorus more correctly associates this directly with the fall of the city. We are told (XXVI, 4): "Meantime the Assyrian king . . . gave way to negligence and distributed to his soldiers meats and liberal supplies of wine and provisions in general to make merry upon. While the whole army was thus carousing, the friends of Arbakes learned from some

deserters of the slackness and drunkenness which prevailed in the enemy's camp, and made an unexpected attack by night." The drunken security which Nahum beheld in his prophetic vision thus survives in traditional recollection.

IV.

Three times Nahum predicts that Nineveh is to be destroyed by a flood. He prophesies: "With an overrunning flood He [God] will make an utter end of the place thereof" (chap. 1, 8). How this inundation is to come upon the city is told in his augury: "The gates of the river shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved" (chap. 2, 6). As a consequence, the prophet declares: "Nineveh is of old like a pool of water" (chap. 2, 8).

This triple emphasis of inundation is more than figurative, and the expression "gates of the rivers" cannot be described away as poetic imagery. Diodorus, recalling the well-known incident in which the river allied itself with the besiegers, recounts: "Now he [Sardanapalus] had an oracle handed down from his ancestors that none should capture Nineveh by force of arms unless the river first became an enemy to the city. . . . In the third year a succession of heavy downpours swelled the Euphrates [!], flooded part of the city, and cast down the wall to a length of twenty stadia. Thereupon the king realized that the oracle had been fulfilled and that the river had manifestly declared war upon the city" (II, 26. 27).

The Babylonian Chronicle makes no reference to this story, but the terse brevity and the summarizing tendencies of the annalistic style preclude any specific corroboration of this incident. However, the Babylonian tablet inferentially offers a very attractive background for the tradition which perpetuates the fulfilment of Nahum's prophecy. According to the chronology of the tablet the fall of Nineveh occurred in the month of Ab. The season of the heaviest rainfall in Nineveh occurs normally in March, while the Tigris attains its greatest height in the month of April and May, the period roughly parallel to Ab. Gadd (p. 18) concludes that the narrative of Diodorus would agree very well with the season as indicated in the Chronicle and concludes: "The truth doubtless is that Cyaxares simply took advantage of the devastation caused by an abnormally high Tigris in the preceding spring to press home his assault upon the only place in the walls which accident had rendered vulnerable."

In further support of the flooding of the city, Xenophon (*Anabasis*, III, 4, 7—12) presents another version of the same incident.

V.

Nahum predicts that Nineveh will be destroyed by fire: "The fire shall devour thy bars," he writes (chap. 3, 13), and he repeats: "The fire shall devour thee" (chap. 3, 15).

Destruction by fire, as frequent as it was in the ancient Orient, was not always the inevitable destiny of a captured city. But Nineveh was consumed by fire. The Babylonian Chronicle again is silent on this detail, which was of no particular moment from its point of view. But this silence is not shared by Diodorus, who records that Sardanapalus "despairing of his fate, but resolved not to fall into the hands of his enemies, . . . prepared a gigantic pyre in the royal precincts, heaped up all his gold and silver and his kingly raiment as well upon it, shut up his concubines and eunuchs in the chamber he had made in the midst of the pyre, and burnt himself and the palace together with all of them (II, 27). And Abydenus echoes the same tradition when he speaks of Sarakos, who "burnt himself and his royal palace" (Eusebius, *Chronicles*, I, 35, 28, 37, 13).

Whatever actual history may lurk behind this dramatic *dénouement*, the excavations upon the site of Nineveh have revealed the truth of Nahum's double prophecy concerning destruction by fire. The consuming flames, Layard, *Discoveries at Nineveh* (p. 231), reports: "The palace had been destroyed by fire. The alabaster slabs were almost reduced to lime, and many of them fell to pieces as soon as uncovered. The places which others had occupied could only be traced by a thin white deposit like a coat of plaster, left by the burnt alabaster upon the wall of sun-dried bricks."

VI.

The capture of Nineveh, so Nahum prophesies, was to be attended by a great slaughter. He draws this vivid picture: "There is a multitude of slain and a great number of carcasses, and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses" (chap. 3, 3). Through subsequent centuries the memory of the carnage and the capture of Nineveh persisted. Diodorus relates: "In two battles fought on the plain before the city the rebels defeated the Assyrians, slew Galaemenes [the Assyrian general on the field], slaughtered many of the opposing forces in the pursuit; and as for the rest, cut off as they were from retreat to the city and compelled to cast themselves into the Euphrates [!], they slew them all with few exceptions. So great was the multitude of the slain that the flowing stream mingled with blood, changed its color for a considerable distance" (XXVI, 6, 7). Once again the Babylonian Chronicle does not pause to relate any particularly brutal slaughter in connection with the capitulation of Nineveh. But if the operations from 614—612 be regarded as one great offensive movement against the city, and if we include the attack on adjacent cities, even the Chronicle tablet is reminiscent of this brutal destruction; for it records after the capture of the city of Tarbis, "in the district of Nineveh" (Obverse,

11, 26, 27), the Chronicler's dismay at the bloody butchery practised by the Medes. It is quite possible that Diodorus, in his story of the blood-tinged Euphrates, has preserved an account of that terrible slaughter on the banks of the Tigris which provoked a protest of the Chronicler and which Nahum envisioned in his prophetic panorama.

VII.

Nahum also draws a prophetic picture of the plundering and pillaging that will mark the capture of Nineveh. Apostrophizing the enemies of that city, he shouts: "Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold! For there is none end of the store in glory out of all the pleasant furniture" (chap. 2, 10). After this pillage has subsided, he looks upon Nineveh and predicts: "She is empty and void and waste" (chap. 2, 10).

The booty taken at the fall of Nineveh was so staggering that the Chronicler uses an expression not employed in any of the other campaigns from 616 to 609. In full harmony with Nahum's prophecy he records of the Babylonian and Median troops that "the spoil of the city, a quantity beyond counting, they plundered" (Reverse, 1, 45). Striking indeed is the harmony between Nahum's prediction "There is none end of the store" and the Chronicler's record "the spoil of the city, a quantity beyond counting."

VIII.

Nahum predicts the precipitous flight which follows the capture of the city. "They shall flee away," he declares (chap. 2, 8); and when bystanders seek to quell the panic of flight and cry out: "Stand, stand!" "none shall look back" (chap. 2, 8). Even the crowned heads of Assyria "are as the locusts" and the military leaders "as the great grasshoppers" that "flee away" (chap. 3, 17).

Ample testimony corroborates this flight. Diodorus preserves the tradition which coincides remarkably with the prophet's prediction of Nineveh's royalty and flight. "Sardanapalus," so he relates, ". . . sent away his three sons and two daughters with much treasure into Paphlagonia, to the governor of Kattos, the most loyal of his subjects."

Whatever historical verity may remain in this incident, the Babylonian Chronicle is even more emphatic, for Reverse, 1, 46, though mutilated, indicates that "[the king] of Assyria before the king" (i. e., of Babylonia) escaped. We may well expand the brevity of this notice by believing, with others, that during the siege of the city a number of the Assyrians, including, as Nahum had specifically prophesied, some of the royalty and the military leaders, made their escape in an unexpected moment, and fled as the locusts that are "gone when the sun ariseth" to distant localities, beyond the reach of the besiegers. "Their place is not known where they are."

IX.

While Nineveh is to be destroyed, it is significant to note that Nahum does not embrace the entire Assyrian nation in this prophecy. After the royalty and the social leaders have fled, the prophet in the last two verses of his book formally addresses "the king of Assyria" (chap. 3, 18). Nineveh, he replies, will be destroyed; but while the capital has fallen, there will still be a king, albeit a *roi fainéant*, whose "nobles shall dwell in the dust" and whose people shall be "scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them" (chap. 3, 18). It is one of the most distinguished services of the Babylonian Chronicle tablet that it substantiates directly the niceties of this remarkable prediction. It may be that one of the leaders who escaped was Ashur-uballit. At least he is mentioned in the annals of the sixteenth year (610 B. C.) as sitting "upon the throne of Assyria" in the city of Harran (Reverse, 1, 60) and in the seventeenth year (1, 66 ff., although the year mark is accidentally missing), when he is specifically called "king of Assyria" and described as an ally of Egypt. Inferences drawn from the Chronicle as well as subsidiary evidences from other sources indicate the weakness of Ashur-uballit's reign, the dispersion of his people, and the general fulfillment of Nahum's dire prediction.

X.

Nahum's prophecies write the *finis* for the city of Nineveh. Not only will the city be destroyed, but the Lord "will make an utter end" (chap. 1, 9); the posterity of the city will be cut off, for, said Jehovah to Nineveh: "I will make thy grave" (chap. 1, 14); Nineveh shall be "waste" (chap. 2, 10; 3, 7); the voice of its "messenger shall no more be heard" (chap. 2, 14).

With perhaps few exceptions every large city in the Orient has been destroyed; but many of them have been rebuilt and have perpetuated themselves unto our day. It is, however, a crowning achievement of Nahum's poetry that he visualizes the "utter end" of the city which in his day was the metropolis of the Near East. How, the modern reader may well pause to ask, could Nahum know that a city of the wealth and power and dominance of Nineveh could be utterly extirpated as a consequence of the assault which his book describes? How could he know that, unlike the city of Babylon, destroyed by Sennacherib in a campaign that was ruthless even for the Assyrians, yet rebuilt by the Babylonians immediately thereafter, Nineveh would never be restored? The answer is found in the assurance of Amos, chap. 3, 7: "The Lord God will do nothing but He revealeth His secret unto His servants, the prophets."

The Babylonian Chronicle records (Reverse, 1, 45) that the assaulting enemies "[turned] the city into a mount and a ru[in]."

It has remained desolate and unoccupied ever since. About 200 years after its destruction Xenophon passed by its site without realizing that the ruins were the remains of haughty Nineveh. He calls the territory Mespila and knows of its history only that it was a city which remained unconquerable until Zeus made stupid those that dwelt in it (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, III, 10—12). To-day the remains of this world metropolis are covered by the debris of two mounds at Kouyunjik and Nebi Yunus.

Layard, reviewing his discoveries at Nineveh, on the eve of his return to Nineveh writes (*Discoveries at Nineveh*, p. 351): "We have been fortunate enough to acquire the most convincing and lasting evidence of that magnificence and power which made Nineveh the wonder of the ancient world, and her fall the theme of the prophets, as the most signal instance of divine vengeance. Without the evidence that these monuments afford we might also have doubted that the great Nineveh ever existed; so completely 'has she become a desolation and a waste.'"

The small volume of Nahum's prophecies may have helped to relegate his three chapters into the neglect which the book has often suffered. But those who investigate its prophecies in the light of historical fulfilment must be impressed with "the more sure Word" with which God has blessed us. If in purely historical matters the Bible predictions are minutely vindicated by actual fulfilment, how much more — so the believer concludes — will the promises of salvation and the pledges of heaven be fulfilled through the divine power of that Word which is God's eternal truth!

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