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COMMUNICATIONS ON THE "ZODIAC-TABLET" FROM GEZER.¹

I.—FROM THE REV. C. J. BALL.

ONE naturally feels very diffident of expressing any definite opinion on the remarkable fragment of antiquity discovered and described by Mr. Macalister. Of course, an object found in a deposit of the Tell el-Amarna period does not necessarily belong to that period. It *may* be of far earlier origin. My immediate impression, on first looking at the photograph, was: Here is what may prove to be a primitive Babylonian relic: an impression which was certainly not weakened by closer examination of the symbols.

The fish with three fins, two dorsal and one ventral (see the photograph), is practically identical with the old linear Babylonian  GA, KU, "fish"; and the bird with the "egg" under its tail

presents a striking likeness to the Babylonian ideogram  MUD,

"to bear," "to beget," composed of the character MUSHEN, "bird," above DUG (see Thureau-Dangin, No. 36). In fact, more or less plausible parallels for some fifteen of the nineteen figures here portrayed may be adduced from the Babylonian writing. Is it possible that this curious document preserves some of the primitive pictographs from which the Babylonian linear characters were developed?

As a whole, no doubt, this seal-device reminds us of the emblems of the gods displayed on Babylonian boundary-stones (see my *Light from the East*, p. 148 sq.), where the Crab seems to be represented by a tortoise. I can see no resemblance to either in the "distorted creature" above the "ibex" here. It looks to me like a bird, just

¹ See also below, p. 78.




To face p. 28.

THE "ZODIAC-TABLET" FROM GEZER.

alighting (see the photograph), and appears to be very similar to the Egyptian *hn* (see Erman, *Gram. Table of Signs*, G, Birds, No. 75). There are several bird-forms among the Babylonian characters, *e.g.*, MUSHEN, RI, NAM, and DAR (see Thureau-Dangin, 33, 34, 40, 42, 548), besides compounds.

The "tree"—I think it such, because the "amphora" leans against it—may perhaps be the archetype of the linear Babylonian

character  NUN, "great."

2.—FROM THE REV. C. H. W. JOHNS.

This is an important contribution to the study of the ancient astral religion. Mr. Macalister is to be congratulated not only on his discovery, but on the very clear and helpful drawing he gave of it, and on the extremely judicious description. Undoubtedly, many of the figures recall the strange signs on the Babylonian boundary-stones, usually called *kudurru*s. I quite agree that the impression was probably made by rolling a cylinder-seal over the clay. Many of the signs recall figures on the cylinder-seal impressions published, for example, in the great *Collection de Clercq*. These figures, like the signs on the boundary-stones, appear to be the emblems of different gods and are used to replace the full figure in many compositions. Whether they were all signs of the zodiac, at any rate in every case where they appear, is not at all clear to me. On some of the stones they seem rather to figure emblematically the gods invoked in the inscription to take vengeance on the landgrabber who should dare to remove, damage, or alter the boundary-stone or its purpose. In his *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen*, pp. 350–474, Professor F. Hommel subjected the representations on no less than 22 boundary-stones to a careful analysis and entirely supports their claim to be considered zodiacal. On the other hand, K. Frank, in his *Bilder und Symbole Babylonisch-Assyrischer Götter*, and Professor H. Zimmern, in his appended comments on the *Gottersymbole des Nazimaradash-Kudurru*, regard these representations as emblems of the gods and not signs of the zodiac. The controversy is still open; but is far too extensive even to epitomize here. This tablet is one more piece of evidence.