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Author(s): George A. Reisner

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The Ḫabiri in the El Amarna Tablets.

DR. GEORGE A. REISNER.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

THREE different explanations have been given of the name *Ḫabiri*, which is used in the El Amarna tablets to designate certain bands of fighting men. The explanation of Sayce that the Ḫabiri means 'the confederates' has been universally rejected because the determinative for country occurs after the word. Lehmann and Zimmern have suggested that the Ḫabiri are the *Ibrim*, or Hebrews. The change of \aleph to \beth in a foreign word written in cuneiform is certainly admissible, but that of *i* to *a*, although not impossible in these tablets, is not plausible. The suggestion of Halévy that the Ḫabiri are Cassites appears to me the best that has been offered, and it seems profitable to put together all that may now be said in favor of this view.

Halévy bases his view on the apparent identity of the name Ḫabiri of the El Amarna tablets with the gentilic *Ḫabiraia* in IV. R. 34, No. 2. In IV. R., the Ḫabirian Ḫarbi-Shiḫu is evidently a Cassite. Halévy also calls attention to the fact that a Cassite king was on the throne of Babylon at the time of the El Amarna letters. Scheil cites in support of Halévy's view (*Recueil des travaux*, Vol. xvi. p. 32) a *Kudurru* stone of the Semitic Cassite period, containing the names of several Cassites, one of whom at least is called *Ḫa-bir-a-a*.

The Ḫabiraia are then either a tribe of Cassites, or they come from a Cassite town or district. That the Ḫabiri and the Ḫabiraia may be the same, there can be no doubt. In addition to Halévy and Scheil, Delitzsch (*Assyrisches Handwörterbuch*, p. 268) has also pronounced in favor of this view. The question remains: Are there indications in the El Amarna letters that the Ḫabiri are Cassites?

The picture given us of the Ḫabiri is that of bands of roving plunderers or mercenaries. 1. They are associated continually with the *Sutu*, the Bedouin of the Egyptian inscriptions. Cf. No. 144 (B. 96), Letter of Namyawaza to the king, line 24: "Behold I, together with my troops and my chariots, and together with my brothers, and together with my Ḫabiri (*Amel pl. SA-GAS pl.*), and together with

my *Suti* are at the disposal of the troops wherever the king my lord may command." 2. The ideogram used to designate the Ḫabiri, SA-GAS (or GAS), which is apparently the usual designation of the people who are called Ḫabiri by Abd-ḫiba, denotes in Assyrian *ḫabbātu* (cf. Brünnow, *Classified List*, No. 3123), 'robber, plunderer.' SA-GAS actually occurs with the phonetic complement *tum*, i.e. *ḫab-ba-tum* in No. 204, l. 26; but on the other hand, *ḫabati* occurs alongside of SA-GAS in 216, l. 74: "Save me out of the hand of the *Amel pl.* SA-GA-AS *Amel pl.* ḫa-ba-ti u *Amel pl.* su-ti-i." The ideogram SA-GAS, while it might actually be used to designate 'robber' was ordinarily held to refer to something else (i.e. Ḫabiri). 3. We also find the Ḫabiri serving different princes. Most commonly they are said to be in the service of Abd-aširta and his son, but we also find them serving other princes, for example, Namyawaza (see above). And even Rip-Addi says (No. 74, B. 57): "As to your message that Ḫaia be brought to Simyra, I gave 13 shekels of silver and a garment as a present to the Ḫabiri (sing.) when he brought the letter to Simyra."

The picture corresponds very well with the picture given by Delitzsch (*Sprache der Kossäer*, p. 11) of the Cassites: "Wie die Sutäer von den Assyern mit Recht als 'Wüstenstämme' bezeichnet werden, so waren ja auch die Kossäer unstät herumziehende, auf Beute ausgehende Wanderhorden, wie es denn beachtenswerth ist, dass Sanherib in den oben mitgetheilten Abschnitt seiner Annalen von den Kossäern nicht allein als in festen Städten, sondern auch als in *Zelten* wohnend redet."

The men who are represented as using the bands of Ḫabiri and Suti more than any others are Abd-aširta and his son, Aziru. Now Abd-aširta is accused of being in league with the king of Kašši (the Kašši which is between Assyria and Elam), and servant of the kings of Mitanni and Ḫatti:

No. 87 (B. 61). "When you ascended the throne of your father's house, Abd-aširta's sons attached themselves to the country of Kaš [Sayce], and they took the land of the king for themselves. Servants of the king of Mi-ta-na are they and of the king of Ka-ši and of the king of Ḫatti."

No. 56 (B. 74). "Abd-aširta is a dog, and he is trying to seize all the cities of the king the Sun . . . for the king of *mat* Mi-ta-na and the king of *mat* Ka-aš-ši; while he is seeking to take the land of the king for himself; and now he has collected all the *amel pl.* GAS against *alu* Šigata," etc.

No. 205 (L. 50). "My youngest brother is in rebellion against me and has occupied the city *Mu*. . . ḫa-zi, and has made an alliance with the *amel* SA-GAS *ki*, and now behold they are hostile to me."

No. 55 (L. 12). "And now behold Abd-aširta has appropriated to himself Šigata and has said to the people of Ammia: 'Kill your lord and be as we are and have rest'; and they have done according to his word and have become like *amel pl. GAS.*"

No. 57 (L. 15). "And all the *amel* governors are seeking this deed against Abd-aširta when he sent to the people of Ammia (saying) 'Kill your lord and unite with the *amel pl. GAS.*' Thus all the governors are saying 'Thus he will do unto us and all the lands will unite with the *amel pl. GAS.*'"

From these notices we see that the Cassites were well known throughout Palestine as might be expected from their important position in Babylonia. It appears further that the Ḫabiri were regarded as the natural agents of the kings ruling in the North; and this would favor the view that they were mere mercenaries whose home was in the North or Northeast. It is, moreover, impossible to view them either as settled in Palestine or as a horde of colonists seeking lands on which to settle. All their hostility is simply in support of the revolt of native princes begun by Abd-aširta on the death of the father of Amenophis IV.

To sum up, the part the Ḫabiri play in Canaan is that of foreign mercenaries, and not that of an invading horde or of a confederacy of tribes; the Cassites are a widespread, influential race at this time; the character of the Ḫabiri agrees exactly so far as we can discern with that of the Cassites. Therefore the identification of the Ḫabiri with the Ḫabiraia becomes extremely probable; and in that case, the Ḫabiri are not Semites but Cassites.