

Article VI.—AN ANCIENT BABYLONIAN AXE-HEAD

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PLATE VI.

In the Tiffany Collection of gems belonging to the American Museum of Natural History is a remarkably perfect and very ancient Babylonian axe-head of pure agate. This object was originally obtained by Cardinal Borgia while at the head of the Propaganda and was subsequently offered by the Countess Ettore Borgia to the British Museum for sale, whence it was returned to her, owing to the Museum's lack of funds to purchase it at that time. It was then acquired by Count Michel Tyszkiewicz for the sum of 15,000 lire (Italian), who kept it until his death, when it was purchased by Mr. George Kunz, of Tiffany & Co., of New York, by whom it was added to the Tiffany Collection, which was later presented to the American Museum of Natural History by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan.

The axe-head is interesting, not only because of its extreme beauty as an artistic production, which undoubtedly entitles it to its very prominent position in this unique collection of gems and rare coins, but also because of the inscription in archaic Babylonian characters, with which its obverse side is embellished. A discussion as to the probable age of this object must depend, first, on the nature of this inscription, and, secondly, on the character of the agate of which the hammer is made.

The dimensions of the Morgan axe-head are as follows: Length, 13.7 cm.; width over the handle-perforation, 3 cm.; length of the back, 1.7 cm.; width of the back, 1.9 cm.; diameter of the perforation, 0.9 cm.

There can be no doubt that the axe-head was a votive object presented to some temple in Babylonia. It is unfortunate that the place where it was originally excavated is not known, as in that case much might be learned regarding the date of the object, which now depends entirely on deduction. This is *not* unique as a votive axe. A fragment of a similar axe in imitation of lapis lazuli, 6.75 x 4.25 x 1.5, was found at Nippur, in Southern Babylonia, by the recent American Expedition to that site. This Nippur axe shows an inscription of seven lines, which may be transliterated and translated as follows:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---|
| 1. | -ni-šu | 'his |
| 2. (Na-zi)-ma-ru-ut-taš | | Nazimaruttash |
| 3. | nu | |
| 4. | -šu | his |
| 5. (apal Ku-)ri-gal-zu | | the son of Kurigalzu |
| 6. (iq-ri)-bi-šu a-na še-me-e | | for hearing his prayers |
| 7. (Ami-i) šu-ur-ru-ki | | (and) lengthening his days
(has given).' |

For the Babylonian text alone, see Hilprecht, 'The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania,' I, part ii, plate 61, nr. 136. The king Nazimaruttash (*ca.* 1340 B.C.), the son of Kurigalzu II (*ca.* 1350 B.C.), was evidently the donor of this Nippur axe-head to the temple of some god whose name is mutilated. The inscription shows how the gift of the object was thought to induce the god to look favorably on the donor, whose gift should be an incentive to the god "for hearing his prayers and prolonging his days." The Nippur axe was found at Nippur in a chamber on the edge of the canal outside of the great southeast wall. It is evident, therefore, that, although this Nippur axe-head is far inferior, from the point of view of pure art, to the Morgan axe-head, the former object is more valuable from an archæological point of view, as we have the exact data regarding it and are able to determine its age with absolute accuracy. It is clear, however, that we must expect an inscription of similar import on the Morgan axe-head, which was plainly an object intended to serve the same votive purpose as that of the Nippur axe.

The text on the Morgan axe-head consists of three lines, very carefully carved inside of a regular cartouche, as follows:

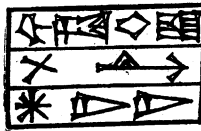
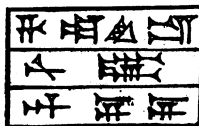


Fig. 1. Inscription, actual size (1 in. x $\frac{3}{8}$ in.)

This may be transliterated into the later cuneiform text as follows:



This may be transliterated in Roman character and translated as follows:

1. *Xa-aṭ-ṭi-iš* 'Khattish,
2. *āšārid* the chief person (favorite)
3. *ilāni* of the gods (presented it).'

That the first line shows a proper name is evident, although we miss here the customary upright determinative, usually preceding proper names. This omission, however, is not without parallel (cf. *op. cit.* plate 51, nr. 121, line 4, the king's name *Ur-(ilu)Bau*; *op. cit.* plate 36, nr. 86, line 2, the king's name *Lugalkigubnidūdū*, etc.). There is no exact parallel to the name *Khattish*, which is probably not a royal name, but that of a high official at some Babylonian city, court, or perhaps that of a local governor, as the axe-head seems to antedate the unification of Babylonia under the hegemony of the city of Babylon by Hammurabi (2342-2288 B.C.). It should be noted, however, that the name *Xa-aš-xa-mi-ir* occurs I. Rawl. 1. i. nr. 10, as that of a ruler (*patesi*) of the city of *Iš(?) -ku-un-Sin*. This name, *Xašxamir*, seems to be a name of the same general character as *Xa-aṭ-ṭi-iš* (see for *Xašxamir*, Radau, 'Early Babylonian History,' p. 30, note). The two signs which are translated *āšārid*, 'chief person,' occur in this sense, V. Rawl. 44, 36c, referring to the god *Ninib* as the *āšāridu*, the usual ideogram for which, however, is SAG-KAL and not our combination PAP-ŠEŠ, which is very rare. The last line presents no difficulty, as the three signs, AN-NI-NI, can only be the ideogram for *ilāni*, 'gods.' It is clear that the verb *iqiš*, 'he presented (it),' must be understood as the grammatical complement to the inscription, which is complete and shows no traces of mutilation.

The characters of this inscription are very antique, approaching more closely in form those of the Gudea period (ca. 3000 B.C.) than those of later date. On the other hand, the dated inscriptions from the time of Gudea show a slightly more linear and less cuneiform character than do the signs on the Morgan axe, where the wedge is beginning to appear, which leads us to the opinion that this inscription may date between Gudea's time and that of Hammurabi (2342-2288 B.C.), when the wedge was even more prominent than we see it in the inscription on the axe-head. The objection may always be raised that we have here a piece of much later work, with the inscription deliberately written in archaic characters after the style of some of the documents of Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 B.C.), who caused inscriptions to be written in imitation of the earlier

Babylonian writing. This does not seem probable to us, owing to the general character of the signs in question, which are too naturally cut to admit of this supposition. Deliberate archaization would, we think, have produced a somewhat more clearly cut inscription and also one in which the linear tendency was not so well marked as we have it here. The accompanying photograph illustrates the linear character of these signs better than the written reproduction.

The stone is distinctly agate in layers, not agate with circular or ring-like marking, which would militate against a very ancient date for the object. The appearance of the *layers*, however, does not preclude the date which we suppose for the Morgan axe, *i. e.*, between 3000 and 2300 B.C., probably nearer 3000 B.C. than the later date.