Prof. Scott B. Noegel
Chair, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
University of Washington

"The Zakkur Inscription."

Translation

1. [..................................] and cut [. . . a treaty?]
2. [. . .]el, my father we[nt up against him when] he fought at [. . .]
3. And my father lay down, he went to his [.......]. And the king of I[s-]
4. rael entered previously my father's land. [And] it was I Hadad made king.
5. And Hadad went in front of me[and] I went forth from [the] seven[. . . -]
6. s of my kingdom, and I slew [seve]nty kin[gs] who harnessed thou[sands of cha-]
7. riots and thousands of horsemen. [I killed Jeho]ram, son of [Ahab,]
8. king of Israel and [I] killed [Ahaz]iahu, son of [Jehoram, kin-]
9. g of the house of David. And I set [their towns into ruins and turned]
10. their land into [desolation..]
11. other [...and Jehu ru-]
12. led over Is[rael.....................................and I laid]
13. siege upon [...]

125. Zakkur Inscription (Noegel)

The basalt stele of Zakkur, king of Hamath and Lu'ash, was discovered by Henri Pognon in 1903 at Afis in Syria. Little remains of the figure that once stood atop the stele, but most of its Old Aramaic inscription has survived, with the exception of some lacunae and about 30 lines. Though the date of the stele is debated (dates range from 805 to 775 BCE), it constitutes an important source of evidence for the Aramean kingdom, and permits a rare portrait into the frequent border skirmishes that preoccupied Aramaea in the early eighth century BCE.

The inscription offers an autobiographical account of Zakkur's annexation of Hazrach (the biblical Hadrach [Zech 9: 1]), and a battle against 17 city-states[155] that ensued because of it. Zakkur describes the battle only in the most general terms. He says nothing of the context or causes that may have led to the war or of envoys or previous contacts with these kings. He cites no specific campaigns and gives no bloody details or lists of booty. He appears far more interested in portraying himself as a man saved by the gods from near certain annihilation because of his piety.

After asserting that the god Baal-shamayin (lit. "Lord of the Heavens") placed him on the throne of Hazrach, Zakkur immediately describes the insurmountable odds that he faced; a powerful confederation of city-states led by "Bar-Hadad, son of Hazael, king of Damascus" (796–770 BCE). The list of coalition forces is partially broken but includes the kings Bar-Gush, the king of Arpad, and the unnamed kings of Quwe, 'Umq, Gurgum, Sam'al, and Meliz, and if restorations are correct, also of Tubal, Kittik, and Amurru (Lipínksi 2000: 254). Far from being a dry roster of players in the arena, the list of kings serves to build suspense by slowing down the narrative and diminishing the likelihood of victory. The reader waits with anticipation to hear what transpired next.

It is at this point that Zakkur, realizing that the attack was imminent, looked not to his generals and chariotry for salvation, but to Baal-shamayin:

> But I raised my hands to Baal-shamayin, and Baal-shamayin answered me, and Baal-shamayin spoke to me by the hand of seers and by the hand of diviners; and Baal-shamayin said to me: "Fear not! For it was I who made you king, and [I will rise] with you. I will rescue you from all of [these kings] who have forced the rampart upon you." And Baal-shamayin said to me: "[I will strike] all these kings who forced [the rampart upon you]... and this wall wh[ich they have raised...]."

The account employs a literary motif well known to students of ancient Near Eastern literature in which a leader receives divine salvation from an imminent battle after praying for help (e.g., Gen 15: 1; 1 Kgs 8: 33–52; Isa 7: 4–9; 2 Chr 20: 1–30). The inscription's mention of seers and diviners is of particular importance to historians of religion since it attests to the existence of the institution of prophecy in Aramaea, and to the access of mantics in the Aramean royal house (Zobel 1971).

Equally important is the fact that Zakkur attributes his victory to the storm god Baal-shamayin, apparently the Aramaic name for Ilu-wer, to whom the stele is dedicated. Though Ilu-wer has a long history that originates not in Syria, but in Mesopotamia, Baal-shamayin appears to have been a local god, though his cult in Hamath may suggest Phoenician influence (Lipínski 2000: 254).

Zakkur's recourse to mantics, the divine promise of victory, and the dedication of the stele to Ilu-wer are all meant to underscore the king's piety. By depicting Zakkur as a man who seeks and receives divine guidance, the stele demonstrates that he has the support of the gods, and thus also of the religious establishment upon whom his legitimacy may in part depend.

Following the divine promise, the stele immediately lists a number of building projects which Zakkur's victory allowed him to achieve.

> [...] Hazrach [...] for chariot [and] horseman [...] his king in its midst. I [built up] Hazrach and [I] added [to it] all the territory of [...] and I established it [...] fortresses on every side. I [bui]lt temples for the gods through[out] my [land], and I built [...] Apish and [...] temple.
>
> [and] I established before [Ilu-Wer] this (very) stele, and [I] inscrib[ed upon] that which my hands [accomplished].

Since such projects, especially those that strengthened the cult of the city god, were deemed acts of piety, this list of projects similarly served to bolster the portrait of Zakkur as a king whose heart is in the right place when it comes to worship. It is he who erected his stele in Apish (modern Afis), perhaps the name of a sacred precinct in Hazrach (Lipínski 2000: 257).

The stele then concludes with a fragmentary series of curses against anyone who might remove it from its place. The curses reaffirm the role of the divine world in protecting the inscription even as they recall the protection of the king from his enemies.

[Who]ever removes th[at which was (accomplished) by the hands of] Zakkur, king of Hama[th and Lu'ash] from the stele, and who[ever re]moves this stele from [befo]re Ilu-wer and carries it off fr[om] its [place], or whoever casts [it] in [. . .]. May Baal-shamayin and Ilu-[wer], and Shamash and Shahar, [. . .] and the gods of heav[en and the go]ds of earth, and Baal[. . .] the man and [. . .] the name of Zakkur and the name of [. . .].

We know precious little about Zakkur. He appears to have been a native of 'Ana on the Euphrates River, a place well within Assyrian influence (Millard 1990). He also appears to have been the founder of the Aramean dynasty at Hamath, and a usurper, since the kings who ruled Hamath in the ninth century BCE bear Luwian (neo-Hittite) names (Hawkins 1982).

We know little more about his enemy Bar-Hadad III (or II). When he came to the throne, sometime before 800 BCE, he had inherited a powerful king-dom from his father Hazael, who both the Bible (2 Kgs 8: 15) and records of Shalmanezer III (858–824 BCE) call a usurper. The extent of Hazael's power can be seen in that Shalmanezer tried twice (in 841 and 838) to take Damas-cus, but failed. It also can be seen by the fact that inscriptions discovered in Greece at Etruria and Samos refer to Hazael as "our Lord" (Dion 1995: 1285). Moreover Hazael's name was still attached to Damascus in Assyrian records more than a century after his death.

The biblical record is somewhat ambivalent about Hazael. The prophet Elijah anointed him king of Damascus (1 Kgs 19: 15), but recognized never-theless that his kingdom would spell disaster for Israel (2 Kgs 8: 12). Indeed, according to the Bible, Hazael and his son Bar-Hadad would eventually ex-tend their power not only to the border of Judah in the south, but to the Arnon River in the Transjordan. It would not be until the reign of Amaziah (800–783 BCE) when Hamath would again be within Israelite control (2 Kgs 14: 25), a border created first under Solomon (1 Kgs 8: 65).

Despite the useful background that such biblical texts provide, attempts to clarify the historical context of Zakkur's battle have met mostly with frustra-tion. Some have suggested that the coalition may have retaliated against Zakkur for uniting Hamath and Lu'ash. Others have argued that though Assyria is nowhere mentioned on the stele it must have played a role in deciding the victor since it was the major power of the day. Indirect evidence for this comes from the Assyrian Eponym Chronicle, which tells us that Adad-nirari III's (810–783 BCE) campaign in 796 BCE reached Mansuate (Millard 1994). If Mansuate is to be connected with the modern town of Masyaf, southwest of Hamath by 28 miles (Lipinski 1971: 396; 2000: 303–10), then the Assyrian campaign of 796 under Adad-nirari III might be connected to the liberation of Zakkur at Hazrach. This also would fit well the record of Assyria's con-tinued interest in the region. The Eponym Chronicle, for example, also lists a later Assyrian attack against Damascus in 773 BCE and several campaigns to Hazrach in 772, 765, and 755 BCE.

Additional evidence of Assyrian involvement comes from a Neo-Assyrian stele now in the Museum at Antakya that describes an Assyrian attempt to settle a border dispute between Zakkur of Hamath and Atarshumki I of Arpad sometime around 807–806 BCE (Donbaz 1990). The context of the event, in which Adad-nirari III gives cessions to the king of Arpad, demonstrates a close Assyrian involvement in the region and appears to be connected to the western campaign of Adad-nirari III in 796 BCE mentioned in the Assyrian Eponym Chronicle. Some also have opined that Zakkur may even have allowed Adad-nirari III passage through his kingdom in order to besiege Damascus (Puech 1992: 329–34; Lipínski 2000: 285). If this view is correct, and there is some tangential archaeological evidence to support an Assyrian presence at Hamath at this time, then Zakkur and Adad-nirari III may have shared something of an alliance. This would then help to explain an Assyrian intervention to save Zakkur at Hazrach.

Additional, albeit weaker, evidence comes from a broken bas-relief, now in the British Museum, that illustrates a capped man raising a bowl and that contains the name Zakuri in cuneiform characters. If this figure is indeed our only portrait of Zakkur of Hamath, it may depict him paying tribute to Adad-nirari III (Lipínski 2000: 302).

It is also possible that the section of Zakkur's stele that describes his building activities does reference Assyrian involvement, though this is debated. There are several gaps in the inscription at this point, but one can make out the name Hazrach, the mention of troops (lit. a chariot and horseman), and the phrase "his king in its midst." Since it is unlikely that Zakkur would refer to himself in the third person, some see it as a reference to the Assyrian monarch, though "his" might also be read "its" and reference something now lost (Lipínksi 2000: 310; cf. Millard 2000: 155).

We will perhaps never know for certain whether the Assyrians intervened on Zakkur's behalf. Moreover, even if an intervention did occur, one would not necessarily expect to find the Assyrian king credited on Zakkur's stele. Such a reference would detract from Zakkur's own glory and would not suit its purpose as a memorial to the god Ilu-wer.

Indeed, the Zakkur Inscription is a literary account of a historical event whose ideological purpose forces us to exercise caution when using it as a historical source. Its literary nature is demonstrated by a number of features, some of which already have been mentioned, such as the text's autobiographical monologue, and the literary motif of a god answering a pious king in time of crisis. Others might be less obvious (Tawil 1974). For example, when describing how the enemy besieged Zakkur the stele employs merism, a device in which opposites express a totality.

And all the kings erected a rampart upon Hazra[ch],
and they raised a wall higher than the wall of Hazrach,
and they dug a trench deeper than its trench.

Zakkur also uses merism when asserting that Baal-shamayin spoke to him through seers and diviners. The word for seer (which is cognate with the term for "seer, prophet" in biblical Hebrew) suggests someone, perhaps a non-professional, who randomly receives divine messages depending on the deity's will, whereas the diviner represents an expert who solicits oracles from the divine. The merism thus demonstrates that Baal-shamayin communicated his intention to Zakkur through every possible means.

In the series of curses quoted above one also finds examples of parallelism: for example, "removing what Zakkur has accomplished" and "removing what is before Ilu-wer." One also sees literary coupling in the section containing the curses: for example, Zakkur and Ilu-wer, Hamath and Lu'ash, Baal-shamayimn and Ilu-wer, Shamash and Shahar, and the gods of heaven and the gods of earth (perhaps also examples of merism).

In addition, the stele uses the same verb for "to establish" with three different meanings, a literary device known as antanaclasis. It first appears in connection with the stele that Zakkur "erected." It then appears in conjunction with the siege rampart that the coalition of kings "raised up." Finally, it is used for Hazrach itself which Zakkur "established." The subtle repetition of this verb in this relatively short inscription draws the three events into contrast and allows readers to connect cause and event. In essence, the erection of the stele and the successful establishment of Hazrach itself remind us of the unsuccessful siege.

The inscription's literary aspects, coupled with other details, have led some scholars to theorize that the stele reworked an older textual source that featured Zakkur's military victory against coalition forces into a new context in order to emphasize the king's piety. Others have observed that the inscription resembles more of a thanksgiving psalm than a chronicle (Greenfield, 1972: 178–84). Still others have found typological parallels in biblical texts such as 2 Kgs 3: 4–27; 6: 24–7: 20; 18: 13–19: 37.

Regardless of how we define its genre, and barring any new discovery that might alter the picture we now possess, the Zakkur Inscription will continue to be one of our most important sources of information for the Aramean kingdom in the eighth century BCE.

126.   Moabite Stone (Schmidt)

There is a general consensus that Frederick A. Klein, a German born, Alsatian missionary working in Palestine in the service of the Anglican church, was the first westerner to see the monument upon which was incised the now famous inscription of king Mesha of Moab. On August 19, 1868, while on a journey to several planned missionary stops on the east side of the Jordan, Klein was unexpectedly shown an inscribed black basalt stone monument by a local Bedouin tribe, the Banî Ḥamîda who were encamped at Dibon. The monument once stood over a meter in height and was more or less, 2 feet