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THE TOWN OF SELLE (ZARU) IN THE 'AMARNAH TABLETS

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EVER since Kùthmann showed in 1911 that the time-honoured reading "Zaru" should be corrected to Sile or Sele, and that the town bearing this name was situated at Tell Abu Sêfah, just east of Kaṅtarah¹, historians have been particularly interested in it. While the syllabic orthography of the name, *Ṭṣ-ru*, shows that it is of late, presumably foreign origin, a fact not contradicted by the appearance of Selle in late nome-lists as capital of the fourteenth nome, the town certainly attained considerable importance during the New Empire. At this time it was the frontier post of Egypt Proper on the caravan road to Syria², and in this rôle witnessed the march of countless Egyptian hosts, bound for spoil and glory in Syria, or returning with due measure of both. Hitherto, strange to say, the name of our fortress has never been found in any ancient Asiatic document. The lacuna we wish to fill in this note.

In the fourth letter of *ARAD-Ĝepa*³ of Jerusalem (Knudtzon edition, no. 288), this prince warns the Pharaoh of the shaky condition of Egyptian power in Asia. After some preliminary remarks he goes on to say: "As sure as there is a ship in the midst of the sea, the mighty arm of the king will seize Naharîm and Kapasi⁴, but now (meanwhile) the Hebrews are seizing the towns of the king. There is no prefect (left) to the king my lord; all have perished. Behold, Turbazu has been slain in the very gate of Zilû, yet the king holds back. As for Zimrida of Lachish, his (own) servants, become Hebrews, have butchered (lit. slaughtered as a sacrifice) him. Yaptih-Hadad has been slain in the very gate of Zilû—yet the king holds back⁵." In another letter ('Amarnah, no. 335) the chief of Zuḥru,

¹ See KÜTHMANN, *Die Ostgrenze Aegyptens*, 38 ff.; GARDINER, *Journal*, v, 242-4.

² See especially GARDINER, *Journal*, vi, 99 ff.

³ This name is usually read 'Abdi-Ĝeba, but the ideogram for "servant" should be doubtless read as a Cappadocian (Naši) word (*Journ. Pal. Or. Soc.*, II, 127). The Egyptian transcription *Krgp* for *Gilu-Ĝepa*, shows that the name of the goddess should be read with a *gh*; cf. Eg. *Sngr*=cun. *Šanḥar*=Heb. *Šin'ar* (i.e. *Šinġar*), *Ngs*=*Nuḥašši*=*Lčš-Lḡš* of the *Zkr* Stele.

⁴ *Kapasi* is usually explained as a mistake for *Kašši* (cf. WEBER, *Notes on the Amarna Tablets*, 1340 f.), but this explanation is most unsatisfactory. I would suggest that the worthy *ARAD-Ĝepa* mixed his foreign names, creating a new blend formation of a very common type by fusing *Kaptara* (Caphtor; cf. *Journ. Pal. Or. Soc.*, I, 191 ff.) and *Alasi-Alašiya*. *Kapasi* is then a vague term for "Mediterranean lands." There is no š in Naši.

⁵ Text: *enâma elippu ina libbi tâmti, qât (zuruḥ=Heb. zerô') šarri dannatu tiliqqi' mât Nahrîma u mât Kapasi—u inanna âlâni šarri tiliq'û awilât Ḥabiru. yânu-mi istên ḥaziânu ana šarri belîya—ḥalqu gabbu. âmur, Turbazu dēka ina abul âl Zilû (Zi-lu-u)—kâl šarru. âmur, Zimrida Lakisi iqqiâšu ardâtu ipšû ana awilât Ḥabiri. Yaptih-Adad dēka ina abul Zilû—kâl. The translation offered by Knudtzon is wrong; *šaknati*=*šaknat* and belongs with the previous sentence; *enâma* introduces an oath or asseveration, like the corresponding Hebrew conditional *im*. The reason for my other changes in rendering will be obvious to any Assyriologist.*

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probably Zoar, in southern Palestine, also mentions the deaths of Turbazu and Yaptih-Hadad, but without any particulars to assist us. Previous writers on the topography of the 'Amarnah letters have made various suggestions in regard to the identification of Zilû, each worse than the preceding. The favourites have been Zelah, an insignificant village of Benjamin, just north of Jerusalem¹, and Selah in Edom², not to mention Conder's idea that Zilû was Shiloh³. Of course, Zilû must have been an important place with gates and walls, which none of the towns suggested, except perhaps the otherwise impossible Selah, possessed.

The point of *ARAD-Gēpa*'s remarks obviously consists in his emphasis on the serious character of the rebellion afoot in southern Palestine. A few lines above, in this same letter, he states that the whole land has slipped from the control of the Egyptian prefects—as far as Seir (*Še-e-ri*) and Gath-Carmel (Ginti-kirmil), the Carmel south of Hebron, near the southern edge of the Judaeian hills⁴. If, then, we identify Zilû with Selle, the meaning of the prince of Jerusalem becomes immediately clear: the two Egyptian governors are slain at the threshold of Egypt, at the very gate of Selle itself—yet the Pharaoh takes no steps to restore the impaired Egyptian prestige in Palestine. Whether the words “at the gate of Zilû” are hyperbole or not is indifferent to our interpretation of the passage, which merely implies that the royal authority is no longer secure anywhere beyond the frontier of Egypt Proper, and that it is high time for the king to bestir himself if he wishes to save anything from the wreck.

From the writing *Zilû* alone, the identification would be at least plausible; the syllable *zi* in the 'Amarnah Tablets corresponds regularly to Egyptian syllabic *ḏ*, as in *Hazi* = *Hḏ-ḏ-y*, as well as to *d* (*Ziduna* = *Ddn*; *Ziri-bašani* = *Drbsn*). The reason for these equivalences is that the *zi* of Anatolian cuneiform orthography, employed also in the 'Amarnah Tablets, corresponds to Semitic *zi*, *si* (with *samek*)⁵ and *ši*. The form *Zilû* is of considerable value in restoring the original vocalization of the name, pronounced in the Roman period *Selē*, *Sellē*, and *Silē*. *Zilû* is not, as might be thought off-hand, a nominative form, but represents an actual pronunciation **Silû*, or the like; the nominative in *u* is no longer used in place-names at the time of the 'Amarnah Tablets. **Silû-Si(e)lē* is another illustration of the change of *û* to *é* between 1300 B.C. and the Coptic age; see the writer's remarks in *Rec. de Trav.* XL, 66, 68⁶. In view of the spelling *Sellē*, I have no hesitation in reading the name *Sillû*; but the Egyptians never stressed consonantal doubling, and only preserved it in isolated cases or secondary formations, so the doubling is not important, and was disregarded by foreign scribes for the most part, as it would seem.

In concluding we may throw out a hint regarding the origin of the name, which is, as noted above, not Egyptian, in all probability. I would suggest that **Sillû* comes from a

¹ This village, the home of Saul's clan, originally bore the name *Šelaḥ ha-Elef*, “Ox-rib,” a fuller form preserved in one passage.

² CLAUSS, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 1907, 73.

³ *Tell Amarna Tablets*, 146, n. 2.

⁴ The combination with Getta, some distance south of Carmel, mentioned by Pliny, is quite impossible because of the context, which demands a town in the extreme south of Judaea.

⁵ The Hebrew *samek* was not then pronounced like *s* (*šin*), but the exact nuance escapes us; the most probable pronunciations are the affricative *ts* or the spirant (not aspirate!) *th*.

⁶ In a letter to the writer Sethe has endorsed this phonetic law, citing also *Šateh* > *Séth* > *Séth*—a very happy parallel.

Semitic **Sillô*—a normal development, since there was no *ô* in Egyptian before about 1300 B.C. or later. The name *Sillô* belongs etymologically with *Sillâ*, probably pronounced also *Sillô*, the name of a town near Jerusalem¹, and with Heb. *solelah*, "wall, rampart," borrowed by the Egyptians as *trrt* (BURCHARDT, no. 1166). We have thus another Semitic name in the north-eastern corner of Egypt, along with *Succoth* (corrupted by the Egyptians to **Sekâ* = *Tkw*, by dropping the final *t*, as regularly), *Migdol*, etc. There can be little or no doubt that these names are relics of Semitic influence during the period of Hyksos occupation—of which more elsewhere.

¹ II Kings xii, 20.