X—*Notes on some Paper Casts of Cuneiform Inscriptions upon the sculptured Rock at Behistun exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries. By Lieut.-Col. H. RAWLINSON, C.B., F.R.S., and D.C.L.*

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THE small paper Casts which are lying on the table are impressions of the epigraphs that are attached to the line of captive figures sculptured on the great triumphal Tablet of Behistun ; and the two large sheets which are suspended against the side wall of the room are from the same locality. This rock of Behistun is a very remarkable natural object on the high road between Ecbatana and Babylon. It was probably in the very earliest times invested with a holy character ; for the Greek physician, Ctesias, who must have visited this spot in the fourth century before Christ, ascribes the most remarkable of the antiquities that were to be found there to the Assyrian queen Semiramis ; and Isidore of Charax confirms this tradition of the country in his notice of the column and figure of Semiramis, at the city of Baptaana, in the district of Cambadene. Now I believe Semiramis to have been altogether a mythic personage. In the historical inscriptions of Nineveh there is no trace either of Ninus or Semiramis ; but both the names are probably to be recognised in the Pantheon. A very remarkable bas-relief at Behistun, which contains the full face of a colossal female figure, and which is evidently far more ancient than the tablet of Darius Hystaspes, represents, I think, the object mentioned by Isidore ; and in front of the bas-relief are the remains, now barely distinguishable from the masses of rock by which they are surrounded, of the enormous pillar which stood contiguous to the shrine of the goddess, and which was doubtless an object of worship. Ctesias asserts that a long Assyrian inscription was engraved on the rock of Bagistane ; and it would seem very probable that an Assyrian monarch, on returning from one of his expeditions into Upper Asia, may have recorded at this holy spot the success of his arms ; but certainly nothing of the sort is to be seen at present. If an Assyrian inscription indeed had been originally engraved upon the rock near the bas-relief containing the female face, it would have been destroyed by the workmen of Khusru Perwiz (the Chosroes II. of the Greeks) who about the time of the appearance of Mohammed laid out a palace on this site, and caused the surface of the rock to be chiseled away, in order to form the back wall of the building. The rock of Behistun doubtless preserved its holy character in the age of Darius, and it was on this account chosen by the monarch as a fit spot for the

commemoration of his warlike achievements. The name itself, *Bhagistán*, signifies "the place of the god;" and the figure of Ormazd, the chief of the "Bhagas," or gods of the old Persian theogony, is thus depicted on the tablet as the presiding local divinity.

The rock, or, as it is usually called by the Arab geographers, the mountain of Behistun is not an isolated hill, as has been sometimes imagined. It is merely the terminal point of a long, narrow range which bounds the plain of Kermanshah to the eastward. This range is rocky and abrupt throughout, but at the extremity it rises in height, and becomes a sheer precipice. The altitude I found by careful triangulation to be 3,807 feet, and the height above the plain at which occur the tablets of Darius is perhaps 500 feet, or something more. Notwithstanding that a French antiquarian commission in Persia described it a few years back to be impossible to copy the Behistun inscriptions, I certainly do not consider it any great feat in climbing to ascend to the spot where the inscriptions occur. When I was living at Kermanshah fifteen years ago, and was somewhat more active than I am at present, I used frequently to scale the rock three or four times a day without the aid of a rope or ladder: without any assistance, in fact, whatever. During my late visits I have found it more convenient to ascend and descend by the help of ropes where the track lies up a precipitate cleft, and to throw a plank over those chasms where a false step in leaping across would probably be fatal. On reaching the recess which contains the Persian text of the record, ladders are indispensable in order to examine the upper portion of the tablet; and even with ladders there is considerable risk, for the foot-ledge is so narrow, about eighteen inches or at most two feet in breadth, that with a ladder long enough to reach the sculptures sufficient slope cannot be given to enable a person to ascend, and, if the ladder be shortened in order to increase the slope, the upper inscriptions can only be copied by standing on the topmost step of the ladder, with no other support than steadying the body against the rock with the left arm, while the left hand holds the note-book, and the right hand is employed with the pencil. In this position I copied all the upper inscriptions, and the interest of the occupation entirely did away with any sense of danger.

To reach the recess which contains the Scythic translation of the record of Darius is a matter of far greater difficulty. On the left-hand side of the recess alone is there any foot-ledge whatever; on the right hand, where the recess, which is thrown a few feet further back, joins the Persian tablet, the face of the rock presents a sheer precipice, and it is necessary therefore to bridge this intervening space between the left-hand of the Persian tablet and the foot-ledge on the left-

hand of the recess. With ladders of sufficient length, a bridge of this sort can be constructed without difficulty; but my first attempt to cross the chasm was unfortunate, and might have been fatal, for, having previously shortened my only ladder in order to obtain a slope for copying the Persian upper legends, I found, when I came to lay it across to the recess in order to get at the Scythic translation, that it was not sufficiently long to lie flat on the foot-ledge beyond. One side of the ladder would alone reach the nearest point of the ledge, and, as it would of course have tilted over if a person had attempted to cross in that position, I changed it from a horizontal to a vertical direction, the upper side resting firmly on the rock at its two ends, and the lower hanging over the precipice, and I prepared to cross, walking on the lower side, and holding to the upper side with my hands. If the ladder had been a compact article, this mode of crossing, although far from comfortable, would have been at any rate practicable; but the Persians merely fit in the bars of their ladders without pretending to clench them outside, and I had hardly accordingly began to cross over when the vertical pressure forced the bars out of their sockets, and the lower and unsupported side of the ladder thus parted company from the upper, and went crashing down over the precipice. Hanging on to the upper side, which still remained firm in its place, and assisted by my friends, who were anxiously watching the trial, I regained the Persian recess, and did not again attempt to cross until I had made a bridge of comparative stability. Ultimately I took the casts of the Scythic writing, which are suspended against the walls of the room, by laying one long ladder, in the first instance, horizontally across the chasm, and by then placing another ladder, which rested on the bridge, perpendicularly against the rock.

The Babylonian transcript at Behistun is still more difficult to reach than either the Scythic or the Persian tablets. The writing can be copied by the aid of a good telescope from below, but I long despaired of obtaining a cast of the inscription; for I found it quite beyond my powers of climbing to reach the spot where it was engraved, and the craigsmen of the place, who were accustomed to track the mountain goats over the entire face of the mountain, declared the particular block inscribed with the Babylonian legend to be unapproachable. At length, however, a wild Kurdish boy, who had come from a distance, volunteered to make the attempt, and I promised him a considerable reward if he succeeded. The mass of rock in question is scarped, and it projects some feet over the Scythic recess, so that it cannot be approached by any of the ordinary means of climbing. The boy's first move was to squeeze himself up a cleft in the rock a short distance to the left of the projecting mass. When he had ascended some distance above it, he drove a wooden peg firmly into the cleft, fastened a rope to this, and then

endeavoured to swing himself across to another cleft at some distance on the other side ; but in this he failed, owing to the projection of the rock. It then only remained for him to cross over to the cleft by hanging on with his toes and fingers to the slight inequalities on the bare face of the precipice, and in this he succeeded, passing over a distance of twenty feet of almost smooth perpendicular rock in a manner which to a looker-on appeared quite miraculous. When he had reached the second cleft the real difficulties were over. He had brought a rope with him attached to the first peg, and now, driving in a second, he was enabled to swing himself right over the projecting mass of rock. Here with a short ladder he formed a swinging seat, like a painter's cradle, and, fixed upon this seat, he took under my direction the paper cast of the Babylonian translation of the records of Darius which is now at the Royal Asiatic Society's rooms, and which is almost of equal value for the interpretation of the Assyrian inscriptions as was the Greek translation on the Rosetta Stone for the intelligence of the hieroglyphic texts of Egypt. I must add, too, that it is of the more importance that this invaluable Babylonian key should have been thus recovered, as the mass of rock on which the inscription is engraved bore every appearance, when I last visited the spot, of being doomed to a speedy destruction, water trickling from above having almost separated the overhanging mass from the rest of the rock, and its own enormous weight thus threatening very shortly to bring it thundering down into the plain, dashed into a thousand fragments.

The method of forming these paper casts is exceedingly simple, nothing more being required than to take a number of sheets of paper without size, spread them on the rock, moisten them, and then beat them into the crevices with a stout brush, adding as many layers of paper as it may be wished to give consistency to the cast. The paper is left there to dry, and on being taken off it exhibits a perfect reversed impression of the writing.

The Persian text of the Behistun inscription has been lithographed by the Royal Asiatic Society, and a copy is here exhibited to show the great extent of the writing. Casts of the Babylonian and Median translations are also with that Society, and these texts will be printed, types having been cast for the purpose, with all convenient despatch.

The casts of the inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes in the Babylonian character, which are also exhibited to the meeting, were taken by me from a place called the Gunj-námeh, near the town of Hamadan, the ancient Ecbatana. They contain the usual formula of royal commemoration found on the trilingual tablets of Persepolis, but they are of interest in exhibiting several forms of characters which are unknown in any other Babylonian record that has been yet discovered in Persia.

General View of the Sculptures at Behistun, taken from the foot of the Rock.

Specimen of the Scythic writing at Behistun, copied from fac-similes taken by impression on the spot.