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Lindsay

An ancient Talisman brought
from Syria

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SOME OBSERVATIONS

ON

AN ANCIENT TALISMAN BROUGHT FROM SYRIA,

AND

SUPPOSED TO BE THE WORK

OF

THE CHALDÆANS,

WITH ENGRAVINGS.

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ANCIENT CHALDÆAN TALISMAN.

A few months since, a Bronze Tablet filled with mystic or cabalistic characters came into my possession through the kindness of a friend who brought it from Syria, and as I found that several of the best Oriental scholars to whose inspection it was submitted, were unable to interpret the characters which appear on it, I determined on Lithographing it in order to obtain, more perfectly the opinions of the learned as to its use and signification.

It is with a considerable degree of hesitation, that I approach a subject so different from those which have in general engaged my attention, and I should probably have abstained from offering any observations on the Tablet in question, had not my friend Dr. Scott of Edinburgh, directed my attention to certain evidences, which prove that it was a Talisman or Amulet, and from the multitude of Astrological and occult symbols and characters exhibited on it, probably the work of the Chaldæans.

Reinaud* one of the principal writers to whom we are indebted for observations on these curious objects of superstition, considers them to be Talismans executed for the Arabs, Syrians and Egyptians, and that the principal or most usual object for which they were formed, was to enable the possessors to recover from the ruins of cities and buildings, but above all from the bottoms of wells the treasures supposed to be concealed in them, and which the great number of hoards from time to time discovered in such places, rendered particular objects of attraction.

With these objects of pursuit were blended the absurd and superstitious ideas, that these subterranean treasures were guarded by certain Genii, whose power

* *Monuments Musulmans du Cabinet du Duc de Blacas* II. 331, & seq.

over them could only be counteracted by the influence of spells and Talismans, executed by astrologers and necromancers, amongst whom the Chaldæans were always considered to hold the first place.

The execution of these curious monuments of superstition seems to exhibit the work of very different ages, but it is not easy to determine their earliest or latest periods, although the earliest including probably the subject of the present notice, may perhaps be referred to an age not much later than the 7th century of the Christian era, when the Arabs first invaded Syria, whilst the latest may perhaps be not far removed from our own times; the intrinsic evidence however of their inscriptions if capable of interpretation may decide these points, or the researches of eminent Oriental scholars may discover other modes of approximating their dates.

M. Reinaud observes that there exist a great number of tracts illustrative of these Talismans, and that they bear the title of "the Book of Treasures," and says, we depend on the positive testimony of an Arab writer Ibn Khaldoun, who says, that in Africa those who wish to obtain the desired result, use the figure of a man drawing up with a cord a bucket from the bottom of a well, precisely as we see on some of these tablets, and that to confirm the effect of the charm, it is necessary to sacrifice a bird and sprinkle its blood on the Talisman.

These subjects we find occupying prominent places on these Talismanic Tablets, the sacrifice of the bird appearing on mine, whilst the figure with bucket is delineated on others, noticed by the writers I have quoted.

M. Reinaud also observes, that the forms of, and he might also have added, the symbols on these talismans vary according to the nature of the places where treasures were expected to be found, and the means employed for their discovery.

The characters on my Tablet are principally Arabic numerals, which Dr. Scott coincides with me in thinking were probably intended for letters, and astronomical signs, and the human figures represented on it, are on one side the figure sacrificing a bird, and on the other seven figures which appear from the nimbus round the heads to be those of Saints, and probably intended to represent the Archangels Gabrail, Michail, Raphail, Azrail, Dedrail, Azrapheel, and Shemkeel, which Layard* mentions to be still revered by the Yezedis.

* Mr. Layard refers to the Book of Tobit, XII. 15, as illustrative of this Hierarchy.

It is not unlikely that amongst the multitude of Arabic numerals which appear on these tablets some might have been intended to denote the date of the year, and it appears from Layard and other authorities, that the era of the Chaldæans was that of the Seleucidæ, commencing 312, B.C.

The Sacrifice of the Bird was perhaps derived from the ordinance in Leviticus XIV. 5, relative to the cleansing of Lepers.

To the engraving of this Talismanic Tablet, I have added another, with which the kindness of my friend Dr. Scott has furnished me; it is the representation of a Calf, said to be an Idol of the Druses, a people whose origin has been so much the subject of dispute, and exhibits characters very similar to those on the Tablet, and which may possibly contribute to its illustration.

The figures and characters on the Talisman now engraved were originally strongly gilt, and the gilding for the most part still remains.

I have delineated round one of the sides of the Talisman, the characters which appear on the edges.



This diagram features a central grid of numbers arranged in a diamond shape. The numbers are organized into columns and rows, with some cells containing small illustrations of figures, possibly representing a calendar or a specific set of data. The grid is surrounded by a border of text, likely providing context or instructions for the numbers.

This diagram is similar to the one above, featuring a central grid of numbers in a diamond shape. It includes a central grid of numbers, a border of text, and small illustrations of figures within the grid cells. The layout and content are consistent with the first diagram, suggesting a related or identical set of data.



Idol of the Druses.





