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SHULEM, ONE OF THE KING'S PRINCIPAL WAITERS

John Gee

Abstract: Shulem is mentioned once in the Book of Abraham. All we are told about him is his name and title. Using onomastics, the study of names, and the study of titles, we can find out more about Shulem than would at first appear. The form of Shulem's name is attested only at two times: the time period of Abraham and the time period of the Joseph Smith papyri. (Shulem thus constitutes a Book of Abraham bullseye.) If Joseph Smith had gotten the name from his environment, the name would have been Shillem.

Buried in the facsimiles from the Book of Abraham is the statement that one of the figures represents “Shulem, one of the king’s principal waiters” (Book of Abraham, Facsimile 3, figure 5). There are a number of things we can say about this figure.

The first is the name *Shulem*. The name itself is widely attested in Semitic languages. The name is a hypocoristic form of the name meaning that it normally appears with a divine name attached but the divine name is omitted. The name¹ first appears in Old Akkadian in the Sargonic Period (2334-2154 BC)² with a hypocoristic form as *Salimmu*,³ and without a hypocoristic form as *Salim-aḫu*,⁴ *Salim-beli*,⁵ and *Salim-Šamaš*.⁶ In Eblaite, the form of the name used is the hypocoristic *Sulum*.⁷ During the Ur III Period (2112-2004 BC),⁸ the forms *Šalim-beli*,⁹ *Šalim-MI*,¹⁰ and *Šalim-šillum*¹¹ are attested. In the Old Assyrian Period (1900-1814 BC)¹² the hypocoristic form is not found, but the forms *Šalim-Adad*,¹³ *Šalim-aḫum*,¹⁴ *Šalim-Aššur*,¹⁵ *Šalim-beli*,¹⁶ *Šalum-aḫum*,¹⁷ and *Šalum-Aššur*¹⁸ are. The name is not popular during the Old Babylonian period (1894-1595 BC),¹⁹ but it still occurs, appearing, for example, in its hypocoristic form as both *Salimu*,²⁰ and *Sulum*,²¹ and in non-hypocoristic forms as *Šalim-Anum*,²² *Šalim-Ašar*,²³ *Šalim-belu*,²⁴ *Šalim-kaluma*,²⁵ *Šalim-kinum*,²⁶ and *Šalim-paliḫ-Šamaš*.²⁷ The name appears in Middle Babylonian texts (1595-1155 BC)²⁸ in two forms: in the hypocoristic form, *Šulum*,²⁹ and with a divine name attached *Šullim-Adad*.³⁰ Contemporarily

at Ugarit, the name is attested both as a hypocoristic form *Šlmy*,³¹ and in non-hypocoristic form *Šlmym*.³²

In Neo-Assyrian times (1132-627 BC),³³ the name still survived as *Šullumu*,³⁴ but it also survived in alternate forms. The hypocoristic forms were *Šullumâ*,³⁵ *Šulmi*,³⁶ *Šulmu*,³⁷ and *Šulmû* for men,³⁸ and *Šulmitu* for women.³⁹ Neo-Assyrian non-hypocoristic forms include *Šulmu-ahḫe*,⁴⁰ *Šulmu-ahḫešu*,⁴¹ *Šulmu-aḫi*,⁴² *Šulmu-aḫu'a*,⁴³ *Šulmu-Aia*,⁴⁴ *Šulmu-Aššur*,⁴⁵ *Šulmu-beli*,⁴⁶ *Šulmu-beli-lamur*,⁴⁷ *Šulmu-beli-lašme*,⁴⁸ *Šulmu-birati*,⁴⁹ *Šulmu-ereš*,⁵⁰ *Šulmu-ilani*,⁵¹ *Šulmu-ili*,⁵² *Šulmu-iqīša*,⁵³ *Šulmu-Issar*,⁵⁴ *Šulmu-lamur*,⁵⁵ *Šulmu-lušeri*,⁵⁶ *Šulmu-mat-Aššur*,⁵⁷ *Šulmu-mati*,⁵⁸ *Šulmu-Sin*,⁵⁹ and *Šulmu-šarri*⁶⁰ for men, and *Šulmu-abiša* for women.⁶¹ In Neo-Babylonian times (625-539 BC),⁶² the name is attested both in hypocoristic forms, like *Šullumu*,⁶³ and non-hypocoristic forms like *Simil-bel*,⁶⁴ *Šulum-aḫi*,⁶⁵ *Šullumaya*,⁶⁶ and *Šulum-(ana)-Babili*.⁶⁷

In Hebrew, the name is attested in a number of forms. There are two hypocoristic forms, *Šillēm* (KJV: Shillem; LXX: Σλλημ and Σελλημ),⁶⁸ and *Šelomî* (KJV: Shelomi),⁶⁹ and the non-hypocoristic forms *Šelumî'el* (KJV: Shelumiel),⁷⁰ *Šelemyâ* (KJV: Shelemiah),⁷¹ and *Šelemyāhû* (KJV: Shelemiah).⁷²

So the name is Semitic, though the form of the name varies across time and place. The form in the Book of Abraham is closest to the second millennium forms and the third century Alexandria form found in the Septuagint, matching the time periods of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Papyri, respectively.

Not only does the vocalization of Shulem match Abraham's day, the social situation of that day is informative as well. Egyptian interest in the Levantine littoral had increased in the last few reigns of the Twelfth Egyptian Dynasty, mainly those of Sesostri III and Amenemhet III.⁷³ This included military incursions as far north as Ullaza⁷⁴ as well as military campaigns further south in the area that is now Israel.⁷⁵ That empire seems to have disappeared by the end of the Twelfth Dynasty.

The Twelfth Dynasty was succeeded by the Thirteenth Dynasty in the Nile valley and the Fourteenth Dynasty in the Nile delta. The Fourteenth Dynasty was "a local dynasty of Asiatic origin in the north-eastern Delta" who are notable for "kings with foreign, mostly West Semitic, names."⁷⁶ "The names of the royal house and of the treasurers of the Fourteenth Dynasty are mainly of foreign origin, though there are a few Egyptian names among them."⁷⁷ While some have argued that the Fourteenth Dynasty "ruled in the Delta contemporary with the Thirteenth Dynasty,"⁷⁸ others argue that "some overlap between the

14th and 13th Dynasties does seem probable, but the evidence suggests that this occurred toward the end of Dynasty Thirteen rather than at its beginning.”⁷⁹ The exact extent of Fourteenth Dynasty territory is in doubt “due to the scarcity of monuments, the complete lack of contemporary documents from this dynasty, and the fact that the Delta, archaeologically speaking, is extremely poorly documented as regards to this period (with the notable exception of Tell el-Dab’a).”⁸⁰ Four reasons have been suggested for this lack of documentation: (1) the lack of available stone in the Delta, (2) Canaanite tradition may have avoided making monuments, (3) deliberate destruction of monuments during the New Kingdom, (4) lack of excavation in the Delta, since only three of twenty-nine sites with Second Intermediate Period material have been excavated.⁸¹ The Second Intermediate Period levels are generally below the water table in the Delta. It does not help that “scholarly controversies concerning the absolute dates of Middle Kingdom-Second Intermediate Period archaeological deposits both in Egypt and the Levant attest to the problematic nature” of dating archaeological deposits from the time period.⁸²

Whether one dates the arrival of the Fourteenth Dynasty toward the beginning or the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty, there would have been a dynastic change during Abraham’s life, with rulers of a different dynasty in Egypt at the time of his visit than had been in charge during his attempted sacrifice.

Early in the Thirteenth Dynasty (in the reign of Sobekhotep III), we have an account of various servants in the vizier’s household who were transferred.⁸³ “The main item is a fragmentary list of ninety-five servants, of whom at least forty-five are of Asiatic origin.”⁸⁴ Many of the Asiatics have Northwest Semitic names,⁸⁵ but many of them have been given Egyptian names “copied or built on the names of their masters,” in this case, the vizier Ressenab, or his father, the vizier Akhu.⁸⁶ Since “all eight of the Asiatic children and at least five of their elders have Egyptian names,”⁸⁷ one can conclude that “the Semitic names borne by most of the adults of our group suggest that they, at least, were relatively recent importations.”⁸⁸ Since those with Egyptian names were named after the owners, it suggests also that the owners, or someone in their families, may have given the names to the children.

Shulem’s title is “king’s principal waiter” which seems like a different translation of the title *wḏpw* “butler”⁸⁹ or “cupbearer,”⁹⁰ or *wbꜥ* “butler.”⁹¹ There are a number of variations on the title from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom. These include *wḏpw iry iꜥḥ* “butler and keeper of the crescent,”⁹²

wdpw n ʿt iwḥ “butler of the meat-pantry,”⁹³ *wdpw n ʿt mw* “butler of the water-pantry,”⁹⁴ *wdpw n ʿt ḥꜣm* “butler of the catch-pantry,”⁹⁵ *wdpw n ʿt ḥnqt* “butler of the beer-pantry,”⁹⁶ *wdpw n ʿt stpt* “butler of the meat-pantry,”⁹⁷ *wdpw n ʿt t* “butler of the bread-pantry,”⁹⁸ *wdpw n ʿt di* “butler of the provisions-pantry,”⁹⁹ *wdpw n ʿwt* “butler of the pantries,”¹⁰⁰ *wdpw n pr-ḥd* “butler of the treasury,”¹⁰¹ *wdpw n pr-dt* “butler of the estate,”¹⁰² *wdpw n ḥrt* “butler of the tomb,”¹⁰³ *wdpw n ḥqꜣ* “butler of the ruler,”¹⁰⁴ *wdpw ḥnty* “cupbearer of the outer palace,”¹⁰⁵ *wdpw n ḥtmty* “butler of the sealer,”¹⁰⁶ *wdpw n ḥtmty-bity* “butler of the royal seal-bearer,”¹⁰⁷ and *wdpw kꜣ-rꜣ* “trustworthy butler.”¹⁰⁸ The range of titles show that the butler primarily dealt with foodstuffs.

Of these titles, the closest to “king’s principal waiter” is *wdpw n ḥqꜣ* “butler of the ruler.” This title is attested once, on a Twelfth Dynasty stele from Abydos in the Musée de Marseille dating to late in the reign of Amenemhet III;¹⁰⁹ the title is borne by a man named Pepy, who seems to be the son of Senuseretseneb-Sobekhotep.¹¹⁰ It is important to recognize that the butler of the ruler did not own the stele, his father who was a *ḥtmw ḥry-ʿ n imy-rꜣ ḥtmt* “sealer and assistant to the overseer of the treasury”¹¹¹ did. Generally, owners of stele are only very high government officials; a high government official might be able to afford a stele, but a butler might not. During the time when Abraham visited Egypt, probably the Fourteenth Dynasty, personal monuments are even rarer.¹¹² Therefore we should neither expect the title or those who held it to appear much in the archaeological or historical record. It also indicates that the title is not a very high ranking one.

Another possibility is the *wdpw ḥnty* “the cupbearer of the outer palace.” The outer palace (*ḥnty*) was “the sector for state affairs, in opposition to the private quarters of the palace.”¹¹³ The cupbearers of the outer palace served as “intermediaries” who supplied the palace.¹¹⁴ Conceptually, the palace consisted of “the main palace building(s), divided into two principal sections, the official quarters at the front (*ḥnty*) and private quarters at the back. Around these would stand the storerooms and general servicing quarters (*šnr*).”¹¹⁵

In a ritual context, the most likely candidate is the *wdpw iry iḥ* “butler and keeper of the moon”¹¹⁶ or “cupbearer, keeper of the crescent”¹¹⁷ because he was “the cupbearer of the king in the context of sacred ceremonies.”¹¹⁸ The title seems to be used “as a designation for the cupbearer who had to bring food to the king himself.”¹¹⁹ This title “first appears in the reign of Amenemhat III.”¹²⁰ One of the holders of the title

claims that he was “one truly known to the king, his beloved, pure of arm in the sight (?) of Horus, when he offers the vital sustenance of the king, overseer of stores.”¹²¹

One of the duties of the *wdpw* “butler” or “cupbearer” was to convey orders for goods from the palace to the scribes in the outer court who would write it down to be delivered to those who would provide the supplies.¹²² The cupbearer would also “have brought the food from the preparation room to the place of eating.”¹²³ In later times, the butler or cupbearer was an attendant on royal family members along with bodyguards.¹²⁴

Another possibility is that the term “waiter” represents the Egyptian title *wbꜣ*, since “the *wbꜣ* ‘foodbearer’ seems to have represented the same function [as the *wdpw* ‘cupbearer’], perhaps lower status or less formal expression.”¹²⁵ The title *wbꜣ* is also translated “butler.”¹²⁶ Besides the generic term, there existed more specific titles, including *wbꜣ n it-ntr* “butler of the god’s father,”¹²⁷ *wbꜣ n t hꜣnqt* “butler of the beer-pantry,”¹²⁸ and *wbꜣ n šnꜣw* “butler of a storehouse.”¹²⁹

The precise form of the title, *wbꜣ* or *wdpw* or variants, is not determinable at this point. There are a number of possibilities which give a general indication of position and function of the principal waiter.

So from Shulem’s name and title and we can surmise the following: From the form of his name, we know that Shulem lived during the late Middle Kingdom or the Second Intermediate Period. Shulem was not a native Egyptian. He was probably a first generation immigrant. He served in the court of a Fourteenth Dynasty ruler, who was probably not a native Egyptian either. If we had the entire translation of the Book of Abraham, we might be able to see how Shulem might have fit into the story or know more about him.

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