

The Archaeology of the Book of Genesis.

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The Creation.

IT is now more than thirty years since George Smith discovered the Assyrian parallel to the account of the Creation contained in the first chapter of Genesis. A good deal has been written upon the subject since then, and it has been generally recognized that the Hebrew account is to a greater or less extent dependent on the Assyrian. At the same time it has also been recognized that on the spiritual and moral side there lies between them a deep and unfathomable gulf. Though the cosmological system in its physical and philosophical outlines may be similar in both, the meaning that has been read into it and the theology that it implies differ as darkness from light. The Assyrian story is grossly polytheistic, the Biblical narrative is uncompromisingly monotheistic; the one begins with frank materialism, in the other all is referred to the One omnipotent and all-good God.

Before dealing with the Biblical account verse by verse, it is advisable to have before us the introduction to the Assyrian story. I have called it Assyrian, because, though it is based on older materials and embodies older Babylonian poems, the story as we have it belongs essentially to the Assyrian age. The story, moreover, is only incidentally that of the creation. It is really an Epic, the object of which is to glorify Merodach, the god of Babylon, and to justify his supersession of the older deities of Babylonia. He has taken their places and assumed their names and attributes because, through his victory over the primeval forces of anarchy and chaos, he became the creator of the world. The creation which had once been ascribed to other gods—to Bel of Nippur or Ea of Eridu—thus came to be associated with a god whose rise was coeval with that of his city of Babylon in the age of Hammurabi.

'The Epic of the Creation,' therefore, is primarily the story of the war in heaven which resulted in the triumph of law, in the creation of light, and the fashioning of the present orderly universe. The preface to it, in which the philosophy of the schools with its doctrine of evolution is embodied, is really inconsistent with the rest of the story, and goes

back to the cosmological system that originated at Eridu, where the land seemed to rise out of the sea through the accumulation of silt. But it was introduced in order to explain the origin of the dragon of chaos and her allies, and at the same time to enhance the power of Merodach, who had brought law and order out of confusion.

The Biblical narrative carefully excludes all reference both to the 'dragon' and to the war in heaven. The God whom it reveals was a God who had no rivals; all things alike were His creation—darkness as well as light, chaos as well as law. It is only when we come to look, as it were, below the surface of the language that we find traces of the old Babylonian conception.

Here is a translation of the opening lines of the Assyrian Epic:

At the time when above unnamed were the heavens
(and) the earth beneath no name had received,
the deep in the beginning was their creator,
Mummu Tiamât was the begetter of them all;
their waters were embosomed together,
the reed was ungathered, the marsh plant ungrown.
At that time the gods had not appeared, any one of
them,
no name had they received, no destiny [had been
determined].

Then were the gods created in the midst of [heaven],
Lakhamu and Lakhamu appeared [the first].¹

Damascius, who transforms Mummu into a son of Tiamât and the Deep, suggests that the name means 'the world of ideas.'

Let us now turn to the Biblical narrative.

Genesis i. 1-3.

I. 1. In the Beginning is an echo of the Assyrian *ristû*, 'the primeval,' applied to the Deep. By implication the Hebrew writer begins by

¹ From the fragments discovered by Mr. King (*The Seven Tablets of Creation*, i. p. 4) we learn that these lines were followed by—

'The ages multiplied . . .
Ansar and Kisar (the Upper and Lower Firmaments)
were created; over them . . .
Long were the days; there came forth . . .
Anu their son. . .'

asserting that it was not the Deep that existed 'in the beginning,' but God the Creator.

God.—The plural *Elohim* for the singular was a Canaanitish usage as far back as the age of the Tel el-Amarna tablets in which the Canaanite writers address the Pharaoh as their 'gods.' The multitudinous Baalim of Canaan were envisaged as so many local forms of Baal, in whom they were, as it were, all summed up, just as the various Ashtaroth were united in the person of the one Astoreth. Perhaps the solar pantheism of Egypt in the age of the eighteenth dynasty may have influenced its Canaanitish province. It is noticeable that in the Chedor-laomer tablets (*Proc. S.B.A.* Jan. 1907, p. 8), Merodach is called *ilâni*, 'the gods,' a verb in the singular following. Neither the construction nor the vocabulary of this verse is Assyrian.

2. Chaos.—'Now the earth had been without form and void, with darkness on the face of the deep.' In opposition to the Assyrian cosmology, the Hebrew writer has asserted that the heavens and the earth were the creation of God. The assertion is so uncompromising, and at the same time stands so emphatically at the head of the verse, that it reads like a challenge, and seems to imply a knowledge and intentional contradiction of the Assyrian account. This impression is confirmed by the parenthetic insertion in the second verse: though the earth was created by Elohim, it had nevertheless existed in a chaotic form, floating, as it were, like silt in a murky deep. The existence of this deep and of the formless earth could not be denied. Hence, in spite of the declaration in the first verse, the work of Elohim was strictly confined, like that of Merodâch, to the creation of the present heavens and earth out of the deep with its formless silt. All this takes us to Babylonia. It was at Eridu, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, that the conception of the deep out of which all things proceeded first grew up; Southern Babylonia, in fact, had been created by the slow growth of the land in historical times. But the materialistic sting of the second verse has been extracted from it by the first verse; though the earth lay in embryo in the sea, its actual creation was the work of the One God.

Moreover, the conception of the darkness which brooded over the face of the deep—a conception which was an integral part of the Babylonian

cosmology—is neutralized by the addition that this darkness was, after all, 'the breath of Elohim.' The life-giving principle was not the darkness, not Tiamât with her brood of anarchic and light-abhorring beings, but the breath of God Himself. Here, again, there is an implicit but unmistakable contradiction of the third and fourth lines of the Assyrian Epic.

Tohû, with which Professor Hommel compares the Assyrian *tinnmu*, 'the heavenly ocean,' is the model upon which *bohû* has been formed, like *hais bais* in Arabic (see Hommel, *Grundriss der Geographie und Geschichte des alten Orients*, p. 131). *Tehôm*, 'the deep,' the Assyrian Tiamât, is used as a proper name without the article, and thus betrays a knowledge of the story of the war in heaven, which the Hebrew writer is otherwise careful to exclude. The word remains feminine in Hebrew, but it has lost the feminine suffix (like ארץ by the side of the Assyrian *irtsitu*) through assimilation to its synonym Ap'su.

3. God said.—Creation by word was known to the Babylonians, and it is probable that there was a school which taught that the world had come into existence in this way, since we have a reference to it even in the Assyrian Epic of the Creation. Before starting to destroy the dragon and create the present universe, Merodach is made to give a proof of his power to do so by creating and destroying a garment in the presence of the gods by the mere word of his mouth. In Egypt the school of Hermopolis taught that Thoth had created the world as well as the gods by his word, which later ages refined into the mere sound of his voice. It must be remembered that ancient Oriental philosophy did not distinguish between the word and the thing: it was the name which gave the thing its existence, and was what the schoolmen would have called its 'substantia.' The statement of the Epic that the heavens and earth were once unnamed was equivalent to saying that they once had no existence. The word, by pronouncing the name of a thing, gave it reality and substance.

Light.—The creation of light ought to have been coincident with the creation of the heavenly bodies (see vv. 17, 18). But in the Assyrian Epic the heavenly bodies are not set apart for marking time until after the destruction of Tiamât and the forces of anarchy, and the creation of the present world out of her body. Light already existed,

since the gods who were represented by Merodach were the gods of light, and the heavenly bodies themselves were included among them. Hence there was no creation of the heavenly bodies; they had been evolved like the other deities; and all the creator had to do was to lay down the laws they should observe in order to register the seasons. The Hebrew writer, however, rejected both the mythology and the materialism of the Epic; there was no war in heaven, there is but one God, and the heavenly bodies, therefore, instead of being divinities, were themselves His creation. Nevertheless he has preserved the position assigned in the Assyro-Babylonian cosmology to the appoint-

ment of the sun and moon and stars as registers of time, and the difficulty in which he was thereby involved is a proof that he must have had before him the Assyro-Babylonian cosmology in much the same form as that in which it is embodied in the Epic. It is also a proof that this cosmology in its main outlines was too firmly fixed to be altered or displaced. Hence the creation of the light takes the place of the evolution of the gods of light from the primeval elements Ansar and Kisar in the Assyrian Epic, and is dissociated from the creation of the sun and stars (which actually produced the light) on the fourth day.

Contributions and Comments.

Genesis iv. 7.

THE R.V. left this verse on the whole unaltered; it replaced 'lieth' by 'coucheth'; changed the punctuation ('doors: and' for 'dōors. And') and added the marginal note, 'Or, is *its* desire, but thou shouldest rule over *it*.'

Let me ask through your columns, whether, then, the R.V. wishes us to refer the pronoun '*his* desire' and 'rule over *him*' to *Abel*, and not to the *sin*, lying or couching at the door. In the Preface to the O.T. the Revisers say, that it was found necessary in some cases to substitute '*its*' for '*his*' in order to avoid obscurity, and they have done so frequently, from Gn 1². 29 onward. Here they left '*his*,' though they changed the punctuation. The reference to *Abel* is, according to my feeling, to be preferred (see the remark of C. J. Ball in Haupt's *Sacred Books of the Old Testament*: 'Thy brother's return [*i.e.* recourse, deference, and submission] will be to thee, and thou wilt enjoy the natural authority of the elder'); but how was, or is, the feeling of the ordinary English reader when reading this passage? and what was the sense which the men of 1611 connected with their translation? In their time also there were many who referred the pronoun to *Abel* (Fagius, Mercerus, Rivet, Grotius); first of all the Septuagint.

EB. NESTLE.

Maulbroun.

The Star of Bethlehem.

THE reading of the Sinai Palimpsest in Mt 2², 'For we have seen his star from the east,' has suggested to me the solution of a difficulty which has long puzzled me. The difficulty is this: 'If the wise men, dwelling in Chaldea, or in Persia, had seen the star to the east of them, how could it possibly have guided them to Bethlehem unless it followed a circuitous route in the sky? On looking at the verse in my Greek Testament, I see that it reads: εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ. May not the words ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ refer to the wise men, and not to the star? and should we not translate it, 'For we, (being) in the east, have seen his star'?

I have the approval of a high authority, Dr. Adolf Deissmann, for the possibility of this reading. I took the opportunity of his being present at the Free Church Summer School in Cambridge to consult him about it.

My reading presupposes, of course, a rather loose construction of the Greek text. But it is in harmony with Dr. Deissmann's own theory, and that of Dr. J. H. Moulton, concerning the popular dialect in which the New Testament is written.

We are unfortunately too familiar with such loose constructions in English. Only a few years ago Miss Emily Hobhouse wrote: 'To continue the concentration camps is to murder the children.' She meant that the death of the children would, in her