# THE SUPPOSED BABYLONIAN DERIVATION OF THE LOGOS

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RECENTLY a serious effort has been made by the distinguished Assyriologist of Oxford, Stephen Langdon, to trane the Hellenistic conception of hypostatized reason to a Babylonian origin.[1] So far as I know, the first attempt of this character was made by Hehn,[2] whose work is not quoted by Langdon, but who anticipated some of the ideas presented by the latter. The well-known Dutch Old Testament scholar, F. Böhl, also holds similar views.[3] If these theories are correct, we must radically revise our estimates of Greek philosophical originality, and at the same time assume a much profounder development of Mesopotamian thought than the available cuneiform sources have seemed to warrant. With Langdon's desire to penetrate deeper into the understanding of Babylonian philosophy we must heartily sympathize. Mistakes can hardly be avoided in so treacherous a field—it is well so, since error may cause the explorer to stumble on discoveries to which initial correctness would have blinded him. However, it is essential that theories of such a nature be criticised by different minds, and that arguments adduced be carefully analyzed; we will, therefore, examine the evidence for Langdon's contention *sine ira et studio*.

[1] See especially *JRAS.*, 1918, 433—449—Note the following abbreviations: *BA* =*Beiträge zur Assyriologie; JRAS.*,=*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society; RA.*,=*Revue d'Assyriologie; SGl.*,=Delitzsch, *Sumerisches Glossar*.

[2] *BA.*, V, 299 ff.

[3] *OLZ.*, 1916, 265—268.

According to Langdon there are two principal sources from which the conception of the Logos may ultimately be derived: *mummu*, which he renders 'creative form,' and *enem Enlil*, 'word of Enlil,' personified in Sumerian hymns and penitential psalms. Let us first consider the latter. Enlil, or Ellil, is the god of storms, whose name means 'Lord of the wind,' and who is continually represented in Sumerian literature as sending in wrath his devastating thunder-storm and cloud-burst upon the land. As lord of the destroying storm, Ellil is represented as overwhelming the low-land with his *ud*, or storm, heralded by his *enem* (=*gu* in classical Sumerian), that is, his 'voice,' not his 'word.' The Sumerian *enem Ellil* is exactly equivalent to Heb. *Ḳôl Yahweh*, 'voice of Yahweh,' used in the Old Testament for 'thunder.' The Babylonian rendering *amât Ellil*, 'word of Ellil,' is as slavishly literal and inaccurate as other Babylonian renderings of Sumerian idiomatic expressions. For example, Sum. *izkim-tila*, 'life-index,' is translated in Babylonian by *tukultu*, 'help, support,' and *ḳiptu*, 'guarantee.' The assumed parallel quoted by Langdon from the Wisdom of Solomon, 18 15, is false; here we have the command of God hypostatized, and there is no reference to the ominous voice of the thunder storm.

The question of the meaning of *mummu* is more complex, since there are two entirely distinct homonyms, both Sumerian loan-words in Babylonian. Hitherto, most scholars have assumed that the occurrences of *mummu* in cuneiform literature outside the vocabularies belonged to one word, and the effort to bring order from apparent chaos has resulted in giving the word the mystic sense 'prototype, creative form,' etc., translations inspired by Damascius' interpretation of Μωυμις = Mummu as *νοητὸς κόσμος*. The old explanation of *mummu* as 'noise,'[4] generally rejected in favor of Jensen's 'form, mould,'[5] is adopted again

[4] The word *mummu* was supposed to be Semitic, derived from the stem *hwm* or *hmm*, 'roar' (Jensen, *Kosmologie*, p. 321 f.). Böhl, *loc. cit.*, derives it from *hmy*, assumed to be the root of *amâtu*, 'word.' All these etymologies are phonetically out of the question, since the Old Babylonian form is *awâtu*, derived, as seen by Ungnad, from the stem *ḫwy*, 'announce,' occurring in Assyrian, Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Egyptian.

[5] See his *Kosmologie*, p. 323 f., and *Mythen und Epen*, p. 302 f. The reasons given by Jensen in support of his rendering are now all antiquated,

by Langdon, who tries to harmonize the divergent theories by speaking of 'creative reason,' or of the creative Word, which shaped itself into form. If the Babylonians really held such metaphysical notions, they were the first thoroughgoing pantheists, not to say monists, in history. It may be shown, however, that the hypothesis is based upon a series of misunderstandings which might have been averted by a sound philological exegesis. It is very unfortunate that exact philology is unpopular in many circles at present, though as a reaction against a philology which claimed wide territories over which it had no right, this lack of sympathy is intelligible. Without devoting more space here to previous conjectures, let us consider the cuneiform evidence. The vocabularies give two words *mummu*, one meaning 'mill, mill-stone,' the other 'lady,' Bab. *bêltum* (V R 28 gh, 63). The first word, like its synonyms *ummatu* and *erû* (from *ara*, SGl 52) is a Sumerian loan-word, from *umun*, 'mill,' while the second, though unrecognized hitherto, is just as certainly from Sum. *umun*, 'lord, lady;' the Sumerian words for 'lord' do not have a sex distinction.[6] *Mummu* as a divine appellative is clearly the latter. *Mummu Ti'âmat* is 'Lady Ti'âmat' (*mummu* may have had a caritative connotation). *Ea mummu bân kâla* is not 'Ea the creative reason, maker of all things,' but 'Ea, the lord, creator of all.' Marduk and Nâbû are called *mummu*, 'lord,' and *mâr mummi*, 'son of the lord (Ea),' expressions which are strictly parallel to *rubû*, 'prince,' and *mâr rubi*, 'son of the prince,' titles of Ea and Marduk.[7] There is nothing esoteric in the phrases *mâr rubî* and *mâr mummi*, which correspond to *mâr awîli*, son of a nobleman,' *i. e.* one who is a nobleman by birth, and hence truly noble. By a natural development these phrases

so it is remarkable that Langdon should have accepted the meaning without an examination. *Mummu* has nothing to do with *ummânu*, 'workman, the oldest form of which is *ummiânu*, a loan-word from Sum. *ummea*, with a Semitic ending affixed, nor can either be derived from the stem *'mm*.

[6] Cf. *JAOS.*, *XXXVIII*, 198 f.

[7] It was upon these appellations that Hommel built his theory of the Egypto-Sumerian heavenly ocean called *Nun* some thirty years ago. Sum. *nun*, however, means 'prince,' read in Semitic *rubû*, and Eg. *nûn* means 'subterranean fresh-water ocean,' Babylonian *apsû*, Heb. *tehôm*.

come to mean simply 'prince,' 'noble,' 'freeman,' just as Aramaic *barnâšâ*, 'son of man,' comes to mean 'man.'[8] The Mummu (= Μωυμις of Damascius) who together with Apsû is slain by Ea in the first uprising of the powers of Chaos, as described in in the first tablet of the Babylonian Creation Epic, recently completed by the Assur fragments published by Ebeling, is originally a doublet of Mummu Ti'âmat. In Sumerian Apsû, as the Mother Engur (Amorok of Berossus[9]) is feminine, as reflected by the statement in the epic that Apsû took his 'vizier,' Mummu, on his lap and kissed him. In Sumerian cosmogony the subterranean fresh waters are the mother of all; the Semites regarded the fresh water ocean, Heb. Tehôm, as the father of all life, who pours his fertilizing seed into the lap of the earth, while the orthodox Sumerian conception is that the fresh water sea is a woman, from whose subterranean womb the waters are born. It would seem that Damascius's idea that Mummu = *νοητὸς κόσμος* is based upon a combination of Babylonian and Stoic ideas, like most of the writings of Stoic and Neo-Platonist comparative mythologists, following in the footsteps of Hecataeus and Plutarch. While it is possible that the late meaning of *bît mummu* (see below) influenced the explanation, it is sufficient to recall that the Sumerians and their Babylonian heirs saw the seat of a mysterious wisdom in the subterranean ocean, the *abzu*, 'abode of wisdom,' an idea which passed on to the Gnostics (*AJSL.*, *XXXVI*, 292 f.), and to the Stoics; Cornutus says (4, 13) of Poseidon, λόγος *καθ' ὃν ἰδίει ἡ φύσις*, and (8, 13) of Oceanus, *ὁ ὠκέως νεόμενος* λόγος. This, however, is only a late and very secondary interpretation based on the Babylonian ideas which began filtering in to Stoic thought through Poseidonius.

It is, however, true that the Babylonians later confused *mummu*, 'lord,' with *mummu*, 'mill,' in their scholastic learning often adopting the most fanciful interpretations, based on folkloristic conceptions.[10] *CT.*, *13*, 32, rev. 10, we read: *mummu*

[8] It is true that there is an apocalyptic connotation to the expression 'Son of Man' in the apocalyptic literature. This question I will discuss in an article to appear in the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*.

[9] See *AJSL.*, *XXXV*, 162, n. 3.

[10] Cf. *JAOS*, *XXXIX*, 69.

*irpêtum liš* (Langdon *ut!*) *taqçibâ-ma—mummu rigmu* = 'Let mummu grind[11] the clouds—*mummu* = thunder.'[12] Another commentary, published by King, *Seven Tablets of Creation*, Vol. II, plate LIV, 82—3—23, 151, gives the following words, taken with slight modifications from a connected text: *mummu. irpêtu. malû. ḳâçibu. nîši. ti'âtu. nadânu*, the original of which may be rendered, 'Mummu grinds the clouds, full of rain, and gives food to the people.' This explanation of *mummu* obviously reflects the wide-spread popular belief that thunder is caused by the grinding of a celestial mill, or by the bruising of the clouds in a mortar with a stone pestle, a still more primitive idea. The clouds are bruised by the thunder stone, and the food-producing rain oozes out. Thus the Brazilian Mundurucus think that the mother of the rain causes thunder by rolling her pestle in the mortar.[13] The thunder-god Indra possesses a great mill-stone,[14] primarily, of course, to produce thunder. Here also belongs the Finnish celestial mill Sampo, and perhaps the German Grotti.[15]

*Bit mummu* is undoubtedly used of a technical school for craftsmen and architects, but there is no proof that it corresponded to our 'university,' and the etymology given by Jensen is impossible.[16] Thureau-Dangin's reading of *UMUN-ma* = *ummuḳu*, savant, as *mum-ma* (*R.A.*, *16*, 170) is erroneous; the correct reading is *um-ma*=*ummea*, savant. The passage IV R 23, 1, Col. 4, 25, *enuma alpu ana bit mummu tušêribu* = 'If you bring an ox into the house of the *mummu*,' shows that *bît mummu* means primarily 'mill-shed,' whence 'work-shop, technical school.'

After the archaic term *mummu*, 'lord,' had fallen into disuse except as an appellative of Marduk and a few other gods, it was very natural to interpret it as 'mill,' and to suppose that it refer-

[11] Assyr. *ḳaçâbu*, 'break, cut,' is Heb. *ḳaçár*, Ar. *ḳâçaba*, 'break, cut.'

[12] For *rigmu*, 'thunder,' cf., *e. g.*, Amarna (Knudtzon Ed.) No. 147, 13. Rammân as thunderer is called *Râgimu*.

[13] *Pennsylvania Museum Journal*, Vol. 8, p. 138.

[14] *Atharva Veda*, 2, 31.

[15] Cf. Kuhn, *Herabkunft des Feuers*, p. 102 f., where the subject is not, however, treated with the breadth to be expected now, after two generations of progress beyond the methods employed in that remarkable work.

[16] Cf. note 5, above.

red to Marduk in his quality of grinding the clouds. It appears then that no Babylonian philosophical theory of creative evolution can be deduced from the use of the term *mummu*.

Langdon goes on to establish a Babylonian principle of cosmic reason (p. 444) from the expressions *markasu* and *tarkullu*, which mean, according to him, 'band, rope, guide, leader,' and finally 'form, pattern.' Incidentally, he takes occassion to ridicule Jensen's translation of the words as 'mooring-post.'[17] It may very easily be shown that Jensen was right in this rendering; both in Egypt and in Babylonia the mooring-post was a most popular metaphor, used to indicate stability and permanence. On account of the similar geographical environment of the two countries, navigation developed in a similar way, and its terminology received essentially the same tropical treatment. In both countries death was the final mooring on the bank of the river of life (Eg. *mny*, Bab. *emêdu*). *Markasu*, like its synonym *maḫrašu*, is a *nomen loci*, from *rakâsu*, 'fasten,' meaning thus 'the place of fastening (ships);' Sum. (*giš*) *dim-ma*, literally 'fastener of the ship,' is translated by *markas elippi* and *dimmu ša elippi*, and *dimmu* is also employed for 'fuller's bat, obelisk.' *Tarkullu*, from Sum. *dur-gul*, synonym of *dim-gul* (ideogram *GIŠ-MA-MUK*, wooden ship-fastener) = *dim-gal*, lit. 'great fastener,' has the same meaning, as is certain from the Flood Poem, where (line 97) the storm-god tears out the *tarkullê* in order that the hurricane may destroy the ships that are moored to them. Anyone who has read a description of a typhoon on a Chinese river will sympathize with the unlucky fisherman whose boat is swept from its moorings. Temples and palaces are called the *markas mâti*, or the *tarkul mâti*, because they tower above the plain, and seem to be in its center, drawing all men to them and ensuring the security of the state by their own stability. Ar. *markaz*, center, metropolis, is ultimately derived from *markasu*. The Babylonian expression is closely related psychologically to the conception of a temple or city as the navel of the world, or the hub of the universe. The transference of the epithet *tarkullu* from temple to god (Langdon suggests the reverse) is perfectly natural; in addition to Langdon's illustrations may be mentioned

[17] Cf. Jensen, *Mythen und Epen*, p. 495.

II R 57 + cd, 55 f., where Ninurta is called *dimgul-anna* and *dimgul-kalamma*, 'mooring-post of heaven,' and 'mooring-post of the land.'

We have some excellent parallels in Egyptian and Greek. In the Eloquent Paasant, B. 1, 90—91,[18] a noble is called hyperbolically 'rudder (*ḥmw*) of heaven, brace (*s'w*) of earth.' Cf. also the illustrations given by Devaud, *Sphinx, 13*, 97 f.: 'pillar (*wḏ'*) of heaven, brace of earth;' 'mooring-post (*nmr*) of heaven, brace of earth.'[19] Similarly, in the Iliad, *16*, 449, Sarpedon is called the ἔρμα πόληος, 'pillar of the city;' the ἔρμα was a post placed under a ship to hold it upright after being drawn on shore. All these expressions are metaphors referring to the stabilizing of something essentially unstable, and do not allude to a creative reason binding the universe together, as Langdon thinks. It is difficult to see why anyone should prefer an esoteric explanation to such a natural and simple one.

The view of Hehn, mentioned above, is more sober, but is based partly on the same misunderstanding of *mummu* as 'divine reason.' Hehn does not allude to the 'word of Enlil,' but lays the emphasis on the sonship of Marduk and his character as savior of man in the famous incantation representing a colloquy between Marduk and his father Ea. Thus Marduk, the *mummu*, would be the prototype of the Logos of Philo and John. Hehn's theory is, however, quite distinct from the views of Radau, as presented in his *Bel, the Christ of Ancient Times*, and Zimmern, who in his brochures *Zum Streit um die Christusmythe* and *Zum babylonischen Neujahrsfest, Zweiter Beitrag*[20] develops very similar ideas, adopted by Frazer and others. The same underlying similarities may be found in the cult and mythology

[18] Cf. Vogelsang, *Kommentar zu den Klagen des Bauern*, p. 85.

[19] For additional illustrations of a similar character see now Grapow, *Vergleiche und andere bildliche Ausdrücke im Ägyptischen (Der alte Orient*, Vol. 21, Part 1—2) p. 12 (metaphors applied to gods).

[20] Zimmern's masterly treatment of the philology should not blind one to the fact that he has misunderstood some vital passages in the first text studied, and that the latter is thus not nearly so striking a parallel to the Passion of Christ as he thinks. The important new parallels with the Attis and Osiris cycle, however, are of the greatest possible interest.

of any Oriental savior god, and have nothing to do with the philosophical doctrine of the Logos.

Between the Hellenic Reason (λόγος = *ratio*, not *sermo* or *verbum*)[21] of the Stoics and the Mesopotamian goddess of wisdom a gulf is fixed, a gulf as wide as that between the Hellenic joy in life and nature and the Oriental dualism of the Gnostics. In my paper, 'The Goddess of Life and Wisdom,'[22] I have traced the development of the Mesopotamian goddess of wisdom through her mythological and theological history until she is finally absorbed with Philo into the Godhead, becoming by the Most High mother of the Logos. Without accepting Rendel Harris's view of the sequence of Sophia and Logos stages in early Christianity, we may note that the two hypostases, similar as they may appear superficially, are yet at bottom as far apart as the antipodes. The Logos represents the belief in the reign of the human mind, and its triumph over environment, while the Sophia reflects the belief in a mysterious wisdom, handed down from gray antiquity, when the gods revealed it to man. The Sophia doctrine is the sign of stagnation, the Logos of progress. Hence the effort to find an Oriental source for the Stoic doctrine of the Logos is bound from the outset to prove a failure.

The Babylonians undoubtedly did possess an incipient metaphysics based upon the animistic conception that the form or outline of a thing is a separable soul, an idea which originated in the beliefs concerning the shadow, and also in the practices of sympathetic magic, where the soul of a man might be captured by being enclosed in a magic circle or outline representing the man's body. Once admitting that the outline of an object had a separate existence from the object, it would naturally have to be considered older, just as the outline or plan of a building or ship, cast by the hand of an architect, is older than the building itself. Hence the term *giš-zar* was employed by the Sumerians

[21] Cf. Haupt, *The Beginning of the Fourth Gospel*, *Am. Jour. of Philology*, Vol. 41, pp. 177 ff.

[22] See *AJSL.*, *XXXVI*, 258—294, especially 285 ff. I am heartily in accord with Zimmern's remarks in *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Ges.* Vol. 74, p. 432, n. 3, that Gnosticism is almost purely of Oriental origin, going back mainly to late Aramaean syncretism; cf. AJSL XXXVI, 290 f.

in the sense both of a specific plan or outline, and of prototype. Before the creation of any person or of any object, that person or object exists as a mystic prototype in heaven, or in the mind of the gods. Since these plans are thought of as being in heaven, they were identified later with the constellations, while the movement of events was believed to be typified in the movement of the heavenly bodies. This explains the origin of the great astrological system, which, with all its absurdities, was mother of our astronomy, and thus one of the greatest contributions of the Babylonian genius to civilization. The kernel of this development of Sumerian metaphysics is found in a passage from the remarkable Sumerian poem, published recently by Ebeling,[23] which describes the creation of the world, and the giving of life to man through the blood of Lamga (name of Tammuz as the architect):

'Aruru (the creatress) a goddess worthy of lordship,
Shall design the plans known to her alone.
O artists and architects![24]
Like grain which grows of itself from the earth (are her plans),[25]
Changeless as the eternal stars,
Which celebrate the festivals of the gods day and night—
Herself she shall design the great plans.'

[23] Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, No. 4. The text has been studied by Ebeling, *ZDMG.*, *LXX*, 532 ff.; Langdon, *Poème sumérien du paradis*, pp. 42 ff.; Landersdorfer, *Biblische und babylonische Urgeschichte*, pp. 66 ff. The passage translated here is taken from the rev., 17—25. My rendering is absolutely independent of the others, and I have not seen reason to change it since comparing it with them.

[24] This line is in the vocative, like the phrase *qiqiš qiqiš igar igar* 'reed-huts, brick-walls!' in the Flood-tablet. Aruru, however, is not directly addressed, as Ebeling supposes.

[25] Ebeling's idea that the 'Weise und Helden' are to spring spontaneously from the ground is impossible. The similes of grain and the stars refer clearly to the plans of Aruru, from which the universe springs spontaneously, like grain, yet which are immutable as the constellations. Compared with her immortal designs the plans and skill of the craftsmen are as nought.