The Old Testament in the light of the Literature of Assyria and Babylonia.

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INTRODUCTORY.

The resurrection of the literature of ancient Babylonia and Assyria has thrown a light on the Old Testament narrative and on the history of the ancient East as valuable and instructive as it was, at the time, unexpected. Instead of comparative barrenness and uncertainty, the student meets with a fulness of detail and a precision of knowledge such as is but little short of marvellous, when we consider how completely this ancient literature had been lost, and what acuteness and devotion were needed to recover the key to its closed storehouse. It is difficult to estimate how many volumes would be required now to tell all that is known, and to publish all that has been found, connected with this science of Assyriology, a few decades ago practically nonexistent.

The Babylonians were a mixed race, partly Semitic and partly Akkadian (supposed Turanian). It is thought that the original home of the Akkadians was in the mountainous region east of Babylonia, and that they descended to the plains, and, by some means, friendly or otherwise, settled among the Semites who dwelt in Mesopotamia. These Akkadians brought with them their system of writing, at that time practically hieroglyphic. This script was developed, in Babylonia, to purely conventional forms, bearing ultimately little or no resemblance to the objects they were originally intended to represent. This change arose partly from the fact that clay, a substance not suitable for drawing on with a stilus, was the principal writing material used, and caused the substitution of wedges for lines of equal thickness, in consequence of their being impressed with the corner of a square stick, and partly from the change from vertical to horizontal writing (read from left to right), in which the characters, being turned sideways, lost, in most cases, their identity as pictures.

Assyria, which seems to have been for a long time colonised from Babylonia, probably declared herself independent about the eighteenth century B.C. The two countries, after this period, were frequently at war with each other. Although the Assyrians, their native language being Babylonian, took the wedge-writing with them, they were probably not over well-supplied with literary material, and for this reason, when they invaded Babylonia, they took care (at least, in later times) to bring back with them such inscribed tablets as they could get hold of, which were duly copied and placed in the Assyrian royal libraries. These literary spoliations seem to have taken place more especially in the reigns of Sargon the Later and Assurbanipal (722-705 B.C. and 668-626 B.C.). With the exception, therefore, of the Assyrian historical inscriptions, contracts, letters, and reports, all, or nearly all, the texts found in Assyria are of Babylonian origin, and were composed and produced in Babylonia.

The inscriptions found in Assyria and Babylonia consist of legends (such as those of the Creation, the Flood (Gilgames), the hero Etanna, etc. etc.); fables (such as those of the fox, the horse and the ox, etc.); hymns (bilingual and sometimes alliterative), penitential psalms (often bilingual), incantations (also often bilingual), proverbs, phrase-tablets in Akkadian and Assyrian, syllabaries in three and in four columns, bilingual lists, bilingual and Semitic glossaries, omen tablets, astrological reports, astronomical observations, contracts, lawsuits, trade documents, lists of kings with the lengths of their reigns, etc.

It is the bilingual lists and syllabaries which form the basis of our knowledge of the Assyro-Babylonian language and literature. The former class are, as their name indicates, lists of words in two languages. They are sometimes arranged according to their meanings, sometimes according to their roots, sometimes apparently arbitrarily. The Akkadian column, as containing the language to be explained, is on the left, the Semitic-Babylonian (or Assyrian) on the right. The latter class (the syllabaries) give the pronunciation or pronunciations of the characters, the characters themselves, and the names or meanings of the characters, or both.
The following will give an idea of what a bilingual list is like:—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sig} & \mid \text{en - šu, } \text{"weak."} \\
\text{si} & \mid \text{e - ni - šu, } \text{"to be weak."} \\
\text{mu-un-na-ab-si-ga} & \mid \text{u-tan-ni-ša-an-ni, } \text{"he made me weak."}
\end{align*}
\]

In this extract, the Akkadian root \text{sig}, also abbreviated to \text{si}, is shown to express the idea of "weakness," and may be used either as an adjective or a verb. The third example shows it with the verbal prefixes \text{munnab}, and the vocalic lengthening \text{a} (\text{munnabsiga}, "me he weakened," corresponding with the Assyrian \text{utannišanni}, third pers. sing. aor. of the secondary form of Piel).

\text{Ēnšu}, \text{ēnšu} (= \text{enšu}), and \text{utannišanni} are probably from the root \text{ššu}, in Heb., "to fine" (weaken by exacting a recompense). It probably has nothing to do with the Arab. \text{نَيَّث}. The Akk. words are often accompanied by glosses giving the pronunciation of the characters in doubtful cases.

The following are examples of syllabaries:—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{u} & \mid \text{g} \quad \text{gi - gu - ru - u.}^2
\end{align*}
\]

shows the beginning of a fresh line, \text{u} is the pronunciation of the character, \text{gigurū} its name, apparently given to it because it has also the values of \text{gi} and \text{gur}.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ab} & \mid \text{ar - ĥu.}
\end{align*}
\]

\text{ār}, as we learn from this, has, when pronounced \text{ab}, the meaning of \text{arhu}, probably a kind of ox, cf. Arab. \text{أرب}.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ba - ad} & \mid \text{pi - tu - u, } \text{"to open."} \\
\text{Uš} & \mid \text{da - a - mu, } \text{"blood."}
\end{align*}
\]

This informs us that the character \text{←}, with the pronunciation of \text{bad}, is rendered in Assyro-Babylonian by \text{pišu} or \text{petu}, "to open," the Heb. \text{נָ֑גְשָׁה}, Arab. \text{نَمْشَح}, (with the smooth guttural, \text{ح}), and, with the pronunciation of \text{uš}, by \text{dāmu}, "blood," the Heb. \text{דָּמָא}.

\text{1 Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia} (generally abbreviated \text{W. A. I.}), vol. ii. pl. 48, lines 19-21 \text{ga}.

\text{2 Syllabary S}, col. iv., l. 23.

\text{3 Syllabary S}, line 254. \text{4 Syllabary S}, lines 222, 223.

\text{5 Syllabary S}, l. 229.


\text{7 So I learn from Mr. Rassam.}
The Assyrian tablets are, in fact, the foundation of our knowledge of the literature of this part of the ancient East, for, being done under royal supervision, they are not only well written, but, unlike the majority of those from Babylon, well baked, and therefore excellently preserved.

Like the Babylonian tablets, the Assyrian ones also had colophons. A very common one was as follows:

Gabri māt Aššur (D.S.), kima labiri-šu šaṭur-maḫārim.

"Assyrian copy, written and reproduced like its old one."

This is often followed by the words (engraved after the tablet was baked):

Kīšittī Aššur-bani-apli, šar kīšāti, šar māt Aššur (D.S.).

"Property of Aššurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria."

The commonest colophon, however, is probably the following:


"Palace of Aššurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria, who trusteth to Aššur and Beltes, to whom Nebo and Tašmēt have given wide ears, (who) hath seeing eyes, the collection of the literature, which thing no one among the kings going before me had possessed—the deep wisdom of Nebo, the mass of the records as much as is prepared, I have written on tablets, brought together, explained, and have placed in my palace for my studying and reading.—Thy prince, light of the king of the gods, O Aššur! Whoever

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1 D.S. = "Determinative suffix."
2 Lit. "Copy of the land of Aššur."
3 The Akkadian group used means "made to be seen."
4 Apparently the words "I am" are to be understood here. A beautiful cylinder in the British Museum, which may possibly have belonged to Aššurbanipal, has the similar invocation: "Thy prince, O light of Nebo, always going behind thee, have mercy upon me" (= "I am thy prince," etc.).

destroyeth or writeth his name with my name, may Aššur and Beltes angrily and fiercely overthrow him, and drive forth his name and his seed from the land."

Not only, however, did Aššurbanipal have tablets made for his own pleasure, but he also presented some to the library of the temple of Nebo at Nineveh. As the colophon attached to these texts is very interesting, I here give a translation of that also:


"For Nebo, the princely son, ruler of the universe of heaven and earth, who holdeth the tablet and keepeth the papyrus of the fates, lengthener of (one's) days, saving from death, establishing light for the people in trouble, the great lord, his lord, Aššurbanipal, the prince obedient to Aššur, Bēl, and Nebo, the shepherd who is patron of the temples of the great gods, establisheer of their ordinances, the son of Šar-haddu, king of the universe, king of Assyria, grandson of Šennachri, king of the universe, king of Assyria, for the preservation of his life, the lengthening of his days, the peace of his seed, the establishing of the foundation of the throne of his royalty, the hearing of his prayer, the receiving of his supplication, to deliver those disobedient to him into his hand, he who is the wisdom of Ea, the guard of the treasure, the prince who hath been caused to come for the quieting of the heart of the great gods, according to the tablets, the copies of Assyria and Akkad, I have written on
THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

tablets, brought together, explained, and have placed (this) in the collection of Ezida, the temple of Nebo, which is within Nineveh, my lord. Look joyfully upon that collection, as the property of Nebo, king of the universe of heaven and earth, and daily take care of Assurbanipal, the servant fearing thy divinity, (and) command his preservation. Let me glorify thy great divinity."

From this we see that it was with a full consciousness of doing an important work that Assurbanipal made himself the patron of Assyrian literature, and it will be no doubt generally admitted that "the great and noble Asnapper" was one of the most enlightened princes of his time. Nebo, the Assyrian god of literature, has indeed "saved him from death." Thanks to him (and be it to his never-dying renown), the Mesopotamian idea of the creation of the world and the flood are no longer hidden from us, and all the "treasures" extant, of which this noblest of Assyrian kings was "guard," will be ransacked to throw light on that Book which, of all others, we hold most in reverence. Assurbanipal's predecessors on the throne of Assyria—the Shalmanesers, Tiglath-pileser III., Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon—all will bring their quota of confirmation or illustration, and Babylon, and Palestine itself, will not be silent, thanks to the Egyptian scribe of Tell-al-Amarna. Every inscription that can throw any light will be laid under contribution. The task, though full of interest, is a difficult one; but the writer hopes to bring at least a little that is new, as well as much that is interesting—a compensation which he trusts may influence the reader to overlook the unavoidable shortcomings of his work.

Requests and Replies.

May "περισσεύω" in St. John x. 10 be understood as though it had the neuter article, so that the translation may read pre-eminently or pre-eminence, instead of "abundantly" or "abundance"?

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Regarding the passage in John x. 10, I am inclined to think the associations in which περισσεύω occurs, as found at all events in the Four Gospels, bind it down to the notion of overplus, abundance, as the primary signification. Compare περισσεύων in the miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, as Matt. xiv. 20, etc. Also περισσεύμα τῆς καρδίας, in Matt. xii. 34 and Luke vi. 45, can mean only overflow in copiousness, not pre-eminence in position. The νομίζω, or pasture, in the previous context, points in the same direction, leading on to the notion of fulness as a crowning consideration. I have only time to adudge one other point, viz. the parallel in Xen. Anab. 7. 6. 31, where ἀφθονος in the balancing clause settles the sense of περισσεύω in the antithesis, so that it must mean "to have a superplus," if we may so phrase it; in other words, a surplus or abundance of it.

W. D. Geddes.

How do you distinguish between the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha?—C. T.

The Apocrypha contains those books which were not included in the Palestinian Canon, but which found a place among the sacred writings used by the Jews of the Dispersion. They were written in Greek, but it is possible that there was in some instances a Hebrew original, though of such we have at present no remains. They were reckoned as part of the Old Testament Canon by the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Council of Trent (see Westcott's Bible in the Church). Pseudepigrapha is a name given by the Rev. W. J. Deane and others to those other Jewish writings (in one case, that of the Sibylline Oracles, early Christian) which were not included even in the Secondary Canon of the Apocrypha. The term means "falsely inscribed," not in the sense of "literary forgeries;... but the authors, having something to say which they deemed worthy of the attention of contemporaries, put it forth under the regis of a great name, not to deceive, but to conciliate favour." Many of them have perished, and we know only their names. But of those which survive, an account will be found in Schürer's Jewish People in the Time of Our Lord, in Mr. Deane's Pseudepigrapha, and especially in Mr. J.