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

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Genesis i. 1–2.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The sacred writer here gives his account of what took place “in the beginning”; and in his short, terse sentences he tells us that the earth was at that time practically a chaotic mass, that darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved or brooded upon the face of the waters, apparently of that deep.

The Babylonian account is parallel, but has noteworthy differences. It is told in poetical form, and at much greater length:

TRANSCRIPTION.

1. Enuma eliš lā nabû šamamu,
2. Šapiš ammatum sumu lā zakrat,
3. Apsu-ma2 rēšū zaru-šun,
5. Mošunu4 šuteniš ḫikū-ša
6. Gipara5 lā kīṣura6 šuṣa7 lā še-ē—
7. Šumma8 ti-ūni lā šu-pū manama,
8. Šumma8 la sukkuru,9 šímata10 lā [kīma?],
9. Ibbana-ma11 Tiāni [rabūt]?
10. laḥmu u Laḥamu uštapū. . . .
11. Aḏī irūš [ti-lāni ?].
12. Anšar Kīšar iḥbanū. . . .
13. Urritu12 iṭū. . . .
15. Ana Am” . . . .
16. . . . Anu”.

TRANSLATION.

1. When on high the heavens proclaimed not,
2. Beneath the earth announced not a name,
3. The primeval abyss was their progenitor,
4. The Lady Tiāmat was the bringer-forth of the whole of them.

5. Their waters at first were mingled13 and
6. The firmament was not bound together, the plain had not yet sprouted—
7. When none of the gods shone forth,
8. A name had not been recorded, a destiny had not [been fixed],
9. The [great] gods were made,
10. Laḥmu and Laḥamu shone forth [alone?]
11. Until [the gods?] grew up.
12. Anšar and Kīšar were made.
13. The days grew long . . .
14. Anu, the father (?) . . .
15. To Anu . . .
16. . . . Anu.

(The continuation lost.)

In this interesting fragment it is clear that the text is divisible into three sections. The first extends from the first to the sixth line, the second from the seventh to the twelfth line. The third division, beginning, “The days grew long,” is imperfect. The arrangement of the first twelve lines in sections of six lines each is probably not unintentional, six14 being a kind of repetition number in Akkadian, and therefore a mark of completeness.

It is probable that the first two lines are connected, and should read, “When on high the heavens proclaimed not, and beneath the earth announced not a name.” At that time “the primeval abyss was then progenitor” (i.e. the producer (apparently) of all things existing), and “the lady Tiāmat (ocean) was she who brought forth the whole of them.” Then, also, “their waters” (apparently those of apsū rēšū, the primeval abyss, and mummu Tiāmat, “lady Ocean”) were mingled, and (or but) the firmament (expansion) was not compacted together, and the earth had not yet brought forth anything.

Having dealt with the physical, the writer of the legend proceeds to speak of the supernatural. The arrangement is similar. When none of the gods

13 Or, “Their waters were mingled together as one” ( analogous from ālu, “one” ). 14 Or, “one”; 61, “six,” the difference being the length of the vowel only.
shone forth, and (as we must, apparently, again read in) neither a name had been recorded nor a destiny fixed, then the great gods were made (how and by whom is not stated). The first mentioned are Lahûmu and Lahâmu, the male and female personifications of the heavens (generally mentioned under the names of Anû and Anatu); Anšar and Kišar (“the host of heaven” and “the host of earth” respectively) followed, and then, as time lengthened (“the days grew long”), “Anu, the father,” in all probability created the remainder of the gods.

“Just as the terrestrial cosmos was preceded by a time when no such cosmos existed, so also the super-terrestrial cosmos was preceded by a time when no such cosmos (i.e. gods) existed.”

One remarkable difference between the Babylonian and the Biblical accounts will probably be noticed, and that is, that there is, in the former, no mention of the creation of the world by the Deity, for the heavens and earth are spoken of as if previously existing, though a form of chaos is implied, neither the heavens nor the earth being at time perfect. In Genesis, on the other hand, the creation of the heavens and the earth by God is expressly stated. Both accounts, however, agree in representing the earth as waste and void, this being implied, in the Babylonian account, by the earth (which Haupt, in Schrader’s ii. 1) being next spoken of. The phrase “a membrane,” in all probability created the remainder of the whole of them,” and that “the plain had not yet sprouted.”

What parallelism there may be, however, ceases with the sixth line, for in the seventh and following Babylonian polytheism comes in, the creation of the gods, with the host of heaven and the host of earth (which Haupt, in Schrader’s Cuneiform Inscription and the O.T., p. 10, compares with “the heavens and the earth and all the host of them” of chap. ii. 1) being next spoken of. The phrase “a destiny (or, the destinies) had not been fixed” (if my restoration of line 8 be correct) apparently means “nothing had been as yet decided.” It illustrates well the fatalism of the Babylonians, with whom “to die” was “to go to (one’s) destiny” or “fate” (ana šimtu) dākū), an idea which remained with them to the last.

Remarks upon the more Noteworthy Words

1. Enuma, which introduces this section and the next (line 7) is a temporal particle meaning when, and may refer to the future as well as to the past. It is composed of enu and ma.—Èfrû is an adverb in -èš from êš, “high,” opp. to šapîš in line 2.—Nabû is the permansive pl., 3rd per. (kal), the subject being šamumu (“the heavens were not proclaiming”).—Šamumu is the poetic plural of šamū (ordinary pl. šame), “heaven” (Heb. חָוָי)"

2. Anunnatu” (here undoubtedly meaning “earth,” see the Babylonian and Oriental Record for February 1890, pp. 69-71) is apparently the subject of zahrat, 3rd pers. sing. fem. permansive kal of zahárū, “to call out.”

3. Apsû, from the Akkadian abzu, means “abyss” or “ocean.” It is generally explained as being composed of ṣê I, ab, “house,” and ʾeᴵ, zu, “to know”—“house of knowledge,” and this must also have been the Babylonian etymology, for, although the word is abzu 3 in Akkadian, it is always written ṣê-I ṣê-I (zu-ab)—in other words, it was generally pronounced “house of knowledge,” and written “knowledge-house.” Notwithstanding the plausibility of this explanation—the god ṣê I ṣê-I ṣê-I, Ea or Aē (‡= “Aos), from ṣê-I ṣê-I, “house,” and ṣê, a, “water,” being the god of the ocean and lord of deep wisdom (bêl nēmēkî)—it is open to a certain amount of doubt, 4 for the pronunciation of ṣê I, when it means “house,” is not ab; 5 but es.—Rēšû, “first,” “eldest,” is from the same root as ṣî-bēlî in Gen. i. 1, namely, ṣî-bêlî, Assyrd. réshî, “head,” “beginning.” I conjecture, from the terminal u, that rēšû was borrowed, at an early date, by the Akkadians, from Assyrian, and afterwards taken back into the latter language as if it had been a word of Akkadian origin.

4. Mummu Tīsunit means, literally, “Lady Ocean,” mummu being rendered, in W.A.I. v., pl. 28, line 63 gh, by bēlûwî, “lady,” and explaining, in Syllabary b, line 90, the Akkadian mum, “lord,” “lady.” The supposition that mummu may be equivalent in meaning to “irrigation” 6

1 Rarely zuab (saše). See Jensen’s Kosmologie, p. 243.
2 This is a transposition similar to that of abzu and zuab.
3 Compare the Expository Times for November, p. 66 col. 2, lines 22 and 47.
4 See Jensen’s Kosmologie, p. 246, footnote.
5 One of the meanings of ab, however, seems to have been “receptacle.”
(Schrader, Delitzsch) seems to me to rest on a misconception. _Tīmat_ is the Heb. רְחֵם, with the fem. ending.

6. _Gipara_ (giparra) is from Akk. _gi_ , "shadow," "shade," "protection," and _para_ , "to spread out." I take it to mean the "firmament" or "expanse" = Heb. בָּהֵם, Gen. i. 6), with which it corresponds fairly well in meaning.—_Šē'a_ (š'ū') is possibly the Heb. לִשְׁמָה, "shadow," "shade," "protection," and _para_ , "to spread out." The Heb. word being apparently written with the hard _n_ (= Arab. چ), as is implied by the Assy. _sihtu_ = _pirhu_ , "sprout." Weakened roots, "doublets," are, however, not uncommon.

8. _Zukkura_ (zukkuru) is the Pu'ul (Piel) permissive (3rd pers. sing.) of _zakiiru_ (see line 2).

10. _Laḫmu_ and _Laḥamu_ are the _Δάχη_ and _Δάχος_ (= _Δάχη_ and _Δάχος_ ) of Damascius (G. Smith, Lenormant, Schrader, Jensen), and are apparently the same as the _Laḫna_ and _Laḫana_ of the lists of gods. Both are explained (W. A. I. iii., 69, 14a, compare also ii., 54, 96, 40e) as equivalent to _Anu_" (Anu) and _Anatu"_, the male and female deities of the heavens.

Verse 2.

And the earth was waste and void (אֲרֹרָה וּרְשֵׁם). In the Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions reference is often made to a goddess Bau, whose name has been compared with the _bohū_ of the above phrase. This goddess was identified by the Babylonians with Gula, goddess of healing, and is mentioned as consort of the god Zaggaba (Ninip). The name of Bau often forms a component part of other names, e.g. _Azaga-Bau_ = _Bau-ellit_ , "Bau is glorious," the name of an early Babylonian queen; also _Dun-agaba_ _gitt_ = _Bau-takīsa_ _bullit_ , "O Bau, thou hast given, preserve alive!" and _Dun-gal-dumu_ _la_ _zā_ _t_ _um_ _ul_ _m_ _um_ , "O Bau, increase and let me see (my) child!" the names of two early kings or heroes. The month Tisri ("the month of the glorious mound") was sacred to her.

The name of Bau is also supposed to be expressed by one of the characters standing for _apsi_ , the abyss of waters.1 The goddess thus indicated is described as the mother of the god _Ēa_ or _Āc_ (Ama-En_–_kīga_ _gī_ ), the lord of the seas and of deep wisdom (see the foregoing page, col. 2). She is named, moreover, _Ama_ _–_ _utu_ _–_ _ana_ _–_ _ki_ , "the mother who brought forth heaven and earth."2 If, therefore, the Heb. _bohū_ have anything to do with the Mesopotamia Bau, it would be derived from her being the goddess who was mother of the earth and of the watery waste (supposing the above identification to be correct).

To the Babylonian, under the name of Gula, Bau was "the mother of mercy" (ummi _rēmī_ ), and as such they addressed to her prayers for life and health.

1 The character in question has the values of _i_ , _id_ (river, river-god), _enugr_ (abyss), _Nammze_ (river-god), and _zikum_ (heaven), but Bau does not occur.

2 Jensen contends that the identification of this goddess with Bau is unprovable and impossible, and he is possibly right. In that case, _Ur-Bau_ of Lagaš, _Ur-Ba_ _bi_ (= _Ur-Bau_ ), father of Dungi, king of _Ur_ , and _Ur-Nammu_ (?) or _Ur-Id_ (?), king of _Ur_ , are three different persons; and the identification of _bohū_ with Bau most unlikely. Cf. also my note in the _Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Arch(o)logy_ for November 1883, p. 10.

Erratum.—By a slip of the pen, the words "for the saving of his life" were omitted from the translation on p. 65, col. 2, line 26.

Notes on Habakkuk ii. 2.

דִּבְּרֵי יְרֵמוּ לָהֶם.

"That he may run that readeth it."

I. Does this text wholly exclude the translation, "That he that runs may read;" the meaning being, that a man may read the tablet easily or quickly, as he runs along from one word to another? The Variorum Bible translates, "That a man may read swiftly," giving the first verb an adverbial force. A tablet might be written so clearly and distinctly that it might be quickly read without any delay or difficulty. It could not be read while a man was hurrying along the road, unless it consisted but of one or two catch-words. Habakkuk's vision concerned character, and was not brief. I do not think that this text deals with running in the sense of running to a place of safety. Simply it means...