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Archaeological Commentary on the Book of Genesis.

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IN the following articles I propose to illustrate and explain the Book of Genesis by means of those archaeological discoveries and researches which have been made of late years in Bible lands. Of philological and critical commentaries on the Pentateuch there are more than enough, of archaeological commentaries there are still but few. The materials are recent and imperfect, the workers in the archaeological field are but a small band, and fresh discoveries are being made in it almost every day. These are the chief reasons which have hitherto made students of the Old Testament reluctant to undertake a systematic treatment of its text from a purely archaeological point of view, and they are sufficient to make any exhaustive treatment of it impossible for many years to come. All we can do at present is to see what light is thrown upon the words and narratives of Scripture by such archaeological facts as we already know. Anything, therefore, like an exhaustive examination of the Book of Genesis, verse by verse, must not be looked for in the articles that follow: all I can endeavour to do is to select the most salient points, and indicate the passages and statements which have been illustrated or confirmed by Oriental archaeology.

GEN. I.—II. 3. The account of the Creation in days, with which the Book of Genesis begins, forms a complete whole. A parallel to it has been discovered among the cuneiform literature of Assyria. George Smith found certain broken tablets from the library of Nineveh which contained part of an epic poem describing the creation of the world. Other tablets belonging to the poem have since been found, and a considerable part of the Assyrian Epic of the Creation is accordingly now in our hands. Like Assyrian literature generally, it had a Babylonian source. In the earliest days of

Babylonian history various legends were current to account for the origin of the universe, and the priestly schools had formed out of them more than one cosmological system. Some of these have been preserved to us, at all events in part. The Epic of the Creation combines certain of these legends and philosophic systems into a single whole, and presents us with an account, half mythological, half philosophical, of the way in which the present order of things came into existence. Of the date of the poem we know nothing, except that it must be older than the seventh century B.C., when the copy of it which we possess was made for the library of Nineveh. Most Assyriologists believe that it belongs to the same period as that in which the other great Epics of Babylonia originated—that is to say, to the epoch of Khammurabi in the twenty-third century B.C. At anyrate, the materials and ideas which it embodies go back to a great antiquity.

The poem begins as follows:—

When on high the heavens were named not,
(and) earth beneath had received no name,
then the abyss of waters was in the beginning their
generator,
the chaos of the Deep (Tiamat) was one who bore
them all.

Their waters were embosomed together, and
the field was uncultivated, the marsh (-plant) un-
grown.

When the gods had not appeared, any one of them,
no name had they received, no destiny [had they
fixed].

Then were the [great] gods created,
Lakmu and Lakhamu issued forth [the first];
until they grew up [and waxed old],
when An-sar and Ki-sar (the Upper and Lower
Firmament) were created.

Long were the days [until]
Anu, [Bel and Ea were created:]
An-sar [and Ki-sar created them.]

Here the tablet is broken, and as the second

tablet or book is lost it is not until we come to the third tablet that the story is resumed. It would seem that when the gods of light and of the present world came into being they found that all was still chaos and darkness. The deep, personified as the dragon Tiamat, ruled the universe along with her followers, a monstrous brood of evil and disorder. Tiamat and her allies now proceeded to attack the new gods, with the intention of exalting Kingu her husband to the supremacy over them. An-sar accordingly summoned the gods one after the other to oppose her. But they all drew back in terror, until at last Merodach, the son of Ea, and the sun-god of the city of Babylon, declared himself ready to face the foe. The fourth tablet or book of the Epic gives a graphic description of the struggle between Merodach and the powers of darkness, which ended in the complete victory of the god of light, and the acknowledgment of his supremacy by the other gods. Henceforward he became Bel-Merodach, the 'Bel' or 'lord' of the world.

But before he was armed for the combat, it was needful that the gods should receive a sign that he was their destined defender and chief. This sign was the omnipotence of his 'word.' A robe, therefore, was laid in their midst, and he was called upon to cause it to disappear and to return again by the power of his word. 'Open thy mouth,' they said, 'and let the robe perish; say to it, Return! and the robe will be there.' Then 'he spake with his mouth, and the robe perished; he said to it, Return! and the robe appeared again. When the gods his fathers beheld the power of the word that came forth from his mouth they rejoiced, they acknowledged Merodach as king, they bestowed upon him sceptre, throne, and reign, they gave him a weapon unsurpassed, consuming the foe.' The struggle then commenced and ended in the utter defeat of Tiamat and her allies. The body of the dragon was pierced by the sword of the god, who leaving it on the ground pursued the other monsters of evil, enclosing them all in his net. He then flung them into chains and prison, while they filled the universe with their cries. From Kingu, whom Tiamat had endeavoured to exalt to the sovereignty of the world, Merodach took the 'tablets of destiny' and hung them on his own breast, thereby proving that he was indeed Bel, the supreme 'lord.' He then turned back to Tiamat, and standing on her carcase smote

her skull in two, at the same time opening her veins so that the winds carried her blood to 'secret places.' Next he split the carcase into two halves, like a 'dried fish,' with one of which he covered the firmament of heaven, setting guardians over it to prevent its waters from overflowing the world, while with the other he made the solid earth encircled by the ocean. Here he created a palace for Ea his father, the future lord of the deep, while in heaven he constructed a corresponding palace for the new gods of the sky.

Here the fourth tablet ends, and the fifth tablet begins with an account of his establishment of the moon and stars to mark the progress of time—

He designed the mansions of the great gods;
he fixed the stars that corresponded with them, even
the twin-stars.

He ordained the year, appointing the signs of the
Zodiac over it;

for each of the twelve months he fixed three stars,
from the day when the year issues forth to its close.
He founded the mansion of the Sun-god on the
ecliptic that they might know their bounds,
that they might not err, that they might not go
astray in any way.

He established the mansions of Bel and Ea along
with him.

Moreover he opened gates on either side,
he strengthened the bolts on the right hand and on
the left,

and in the midst of (the heavens) he made the
Zenith.

He illuminated the moon-god that he might be
watchman of the night,
and ordained him to be a luminary of the night that
time might be known,
(saying): Month by month, without break, keep
watch in (thy) disk.

At the beginning of the month, when the evening
comes on,

glitter with thy horns, that the heavens may know.

On the seventh day halve (thy) disk,
stand upright on the Sabbath with the first half.

The rest of the tablet is either wholly lost or too much injured to yield any certain translation, and of the sixth, or perhaps the seventh tablet, only the opening lines have been preserved—

When the gods in their assembly created [the
beasts],

they made perfect the mighty [creatures],
they caused the living creatures [of the field] to come
forth,

the cattle of the field, [the wild beasts] of the field,
and the creeping things [of the field]:

[they fixed their habitations] for the living creatures
of the field.

The rest is mutilated, and a connected translation would consequently have to rest upon conjecture.

George Smith pointed out that the order of creation is the same as that in the first chapter of Genesis, that in both accounts the heavenly bodies are appointed in order to be a measure of time, and that the Babylonian poet seems to divide the work of creation into six distinct acts. Since his death those portions of the poem have been discovered which interpolate the history of the struggle with the great 'dragon' Tiamat between the period of chaos and that of the present creation, and thus render the parallelism between the biblical and Babylonian narratives less close than he believed. The history of the struggle with Tiamat, however, constitutes so considerable a part of the epic as to show that it must have been primarily a hymn in praise of Merodach, declaring him to have been the creator of the world, and explaining how he came to be sovereign over the gods. As Merodach was the divine patron of Babylon, we may conclude that the poet was a native of that city, and that his poem was written for E-Sagila, the great temple of Bel-Merodach, which stood there.

Between the biblical and Babylonian accounts, in spite of the agreement in their fundamental conceptions of the origin of the universe and the order of the creation, there is nevertheless an impassable gulf. While the Babylonian story is polytheistic and mythological, with an element of materialistic philosophy introduced at its commencement, the biblical narrative is uncompromisingly monotheistic. All mythological elements are sternly excluded from it, and though a knowledge of the Babylonian myth is indicated by the fact that תהום, the Hebrew representative of Tiamat, is used in ver. 2 without the article, all reference to the myth is carefully omitted. In place of the struggle between Merodach and Tiamat, we have God creating the firmament by the power of His word.

We are now in a position to examine the biblical narrative, verse by verse.

I. 1. The opposition between the Babylonian and biblical doctrine of the origin of the universe is such as to imply that the Babylonian doctrine was known to the Hebrew writer, and was intentionally contradicted by him. Whereas, according to the Babylonian system of cosmology, there was

nothing 'in the beginning' but a self-evolved chaos of waters, the enemy of the gods of light, the Bible begins with the declaration that 'in the beginning' the heavens and earth, in opposition to chaos, were created by the supreme God. The Hebrew, *rēshith*, 'beginning,' closely corresponds with the Babylonian *ristū*. In that beginning the Chaldean Epic declares 'the heavens' and 'the earth' had not as yet been named, that is to say, made, the name and existence of a thing being identical according to Babylonian ideas; while the biblical narrative asserts just as explicitly that they were already created by God. The commencement of the Hebrew account is thus a formal contradiction of the commencement of the Babylonian account. And since the mention of the heavens and earth would not naturally precede the mention of chaos, it is difficult not to see in the Hebrew account an intentional contradiction and correction of that of the Babylonians.

The use of the plural Elohim for the singular God has been in part explained by the Tel el-Amarna tablets. In these the Pharaoh is frequently addressed by his Canaanite correspondents as 'my gods.' The application of the plural 'gods' to a single person was therefore current in Canaan before the birth of Moses, and we must regard it as having already become an idiom of that 'language of Canaan' which we call Hebrew. Consequently it is no argument in favour of a development from polytheism into monotheism among the Israelites, though it may point to such a development among the Canaanites before the Israelitish conquest of Canaan. ✕

2. 'Now the earth had been waste and desolate.' The pluperfect tense is used here. The Babylonian Epic implies that the earth was already in existence, otherwise it would not be said that it had as yet received no name; but since name and existence were identical, it must have been a chaotic and not the present earth. *Bohū*, 'desolation,' is probably borrowed from Bau, the name of the primeval goddess among the Babylonians, who seems to have been borrowed by the Semitic Babylonians from Sumerian. At all events, the name is found in Sumerian texts of an early date.

'And darkness was upon the face of the deep.' *Tehôm*, 'the deep,' is the Babylonian Tiamat, which has the feminine suffix *t* like *irzīt*, 'earth,' by the side of the Heb. *erez*. The 'deep' is used in a purely physical sense, but the fact that

the article is not prefixed shows that the word had once been current in Hebrew as a mythological name. Here again, therefore, the biblical writer implicitly contradicts the Babylonian story: *tehôm* was not the mythological being Tiamat, but the physical waste of waters. Darkness was the realm of Tiamat and her allies, among whom was to be found 'the serpent of darkness,' who may indeed have been Tiamat herself.

'And the breath of God fluttered over the face of the waters.' There is nothing corresponding to this in the Babylonian Epic. But we have evidence that an allied conception was not unknown in Babylonia. The fragments of Phœnician cosmology which have been preserved by Philo Byblius show that it was based upon that of Babylonia, and among these fragments is one which is as follows:—'The beginning of all things was a dark and condensed windy air, or a breeze of dark air, and a chaos turbid and black as Erebus; and these were unbounded, and for a long series of ages destitute of form. But when this wind became enamoured of its own first principles, and an intimate union took place, that connexion was called Desire; and it was the beginning of the creation of all things.'

5-8. The mutilation of the cuneiform tablet prevents our knowing whether the creation of light was described in the Babylonian Epic. It is, however, probable that it was, since the heavenly bodies are stated in the fifth tablet to have been ordained for the purpose of marking time, not to have been created in order to produce light. Moreover, the gods of light, including Merodach the sun-god, were already in existence. The creation of light, nevertheless, if described in the epic, will have followed the creation—or rather the evolution—of the firmament, instead of preceding it as in Genesis. The firmament, furthermore, is represented under the mythological forms of An-sar and Ki-sar ('the god' and 'the place' of the heavenly hosts), and its appearance is the result of a process of evolution. We have therefore the Gnostic idea of the emanation of æons instead of the biblical creation by the word of God.

The parallel to the word of God is to be found in the legend of the struggle between Merodach and the dragon, the proof that Merodach was destined to overcome the forces of darkness and become the supreme 'lord' of the universe being the power of his 'word' to destroy and re-create.

The legend forms a complete poem in itself, and was, in fact, a hymn in honour of the patron-god of Babylon. In its fundamental point of view it has little in common either with the materialising and philosophic conception of the origin of the universe contained in the first tablet of the Assyrian Epic, or with the view of the creation of things embodied in the tablets which follow it. It is clear that the author of the epic not only combined into a whole more than one current doctrine of the Creation, but that he must also have incorporated into his work an older poem. An analogy to this is found in the Epic of Gilgames, into which an older poem describing the Deluge has similarly been incorporated. The composite character of the Epic of the Creation explains the discrepancy between the statement in the first tablet that the firmament was the result of evolution 'in the beginning,' whereas the story of the struggle with Tiamat makes it the skin of the monster which was stretched by Merodach across the sky.

The biblical writer seems to have been acquainted with this latter legend, since he implicitly contradicts it. According to the Babylonian myth, guardians were appointed to prevent the waters of Tiamat, which were above the firmament, from gushing forth, the firmament itself dividing the waters which were above it from those of the encircling ocean on which the earth floated. In the Bible also we hear of the waters above and below the firmament, but the firmament is no longer half the divided body of Tiamat: it is the physical heaven which is created by the word of God. With the creation of the firmament the heaven receives a name, and so comes to exist. In this name-giving we may see a reference to the opening words of the Babylonian Epic.

9, 10. According to the Babylonian poem the waters of Tiamat had been 'embosomed' (*ikhigûl*) or 'gathered together in one place' (*istenis*); the Bible tells us that this was done after the creation of the firmament, the waters being those of the present world and not of chaos. It was after the overthrow of Tiamat that the Babylonian story makes Merodach create the earth, setting it 'over against the ocean,' which he measured and placed within bounds, erecting in it a palace for its god like that of heaven. It was after the overthrow of Tiamat, moreover, that the gods 'rejoiced and were glad, and brought peace-offerings' to Bel. In opposition to this, the Book of Genesis declares

that it was God who rejoiced over the completion of His own work. Once more every trace of the polytheism and mythology of the Babylonian legend is uncompromisingly excluded.

11-13. As the Babylonian writer has introduced the legend of the destruction of Tiamat between the work of the first and second days, so the Hebrew writer has inserted the creation of vegetables between the creation of the earth and the appointment of the heavenly bodies, thus making it part of the work of the third day. In this, however, he has followed the order of ideas in the first tablet of the Babylonian Epic, where we read that while the waters of chaos were embosomed together, 'the field was uncultivated, the marsh-plant ungrown.' The appearance of the earth above the waters was the signal for the appearance of the vegetable world. But the Babylonian poet has evidently considered that the growth of plants depends upon the existence of time, and that before the appointment of the heavenly bodies to measure time, times and seasons did not exist. He has consequently postponed the creation of vegetables to a later stage of creative energy.

14-19. The parallelism between the two accounts of the work of the fourth day is very close, since in both the heavenly bodies are said to have been appointed to give light and to measure time; not to have been created. It is assumed in both narratives that they were already in existence. In fact, the creation of the heavens and earth implies at the same time the creation of the sun, moon, and stars. It will be noticed that as the Babylonian poet expressly states that Bel 'illuminated the moon-god,' so in Genesis we read that God ordained that the heavenly bodies should 'give light upon the earth.' In one point, however, the Babylonian version has been modified in accordance with Palestinian ideas. Babylonia was the native land of astronomy, and the moon occupied a more important place in the minds of the inhabitants than the sun. The Babylonian Epic, therefore, mentions the moon first; in the Bible the sun takes precedence of the moon.

20-23. The portion of the epic which described the creation of the denizens of the water and the air has not yet been recovered. The water and air were the realms of the gods Ea and Anu, who shared with Bel, the god of the earth, the government of the world. While, therefore, the work of creation in the realm of Bel would be treated by itself, that in the realms of Ea and Anu would naturally be combined together. It is accordingly probable that the Babylonian account agreed with that of Genesis in coupling the creation of the fish of the sea with that of the fowls of the air.

24. It can hardly be an accident that the two accounts describe the animals of the earth in exactly the same way (in contrast to Gen. ii. 20). In the one we have 'cattle of the field, wild beasts of the field, and creeping things'; in the other, 'cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth.' But whereas these are created by the 'gods' in the Babylonian story, they are the creation of the one God in the Bible.

26. *Adam*, 'man,' is the Babylonian *adamu*, which may have been imported into Canaan in the period of Babylonian influence. It is doubtful whether the root is that which is found in *adamu*, 'red,' or that which we have in *admu*, 'offspring,' and *admānu*, 'a building.' In the latter case, *adamu*, or 'man,' would be 'the built up' or 'created one.'

An old Babylonian legend made Adapa the first man, and the name of Adapa can be read Adama.

The Babylonian gods were represented under the form of men, so that men would have been described as created in their 'image.' A text recently discovered by Mr. Pinches says that 'the man *sagsabbar* is the *zalam*' or 'image of the god Nergal; the man who makes rich is the image of the god Dan; the man *zazakku* is the image of the god Isum.' Isum was called *Zagzagga*, 'he who strikes the head,' in Sumerian, and *zazakku* seems to be a Semitised form of the Sumerian word.

27. 'Male and female' is the Semitic collocation of words. In the Sumerian texts we find 'female and male,' which the Semitic Babylonian translation invariably renders 'male and female.'