

## Babylonian Witchcraft.

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THE land of Chaldea has always been regarded as the home of mystery—the abode of the magician and sorcerer. The Hebrew Scriptures, and especially the later works, abound in references to both Chaldean and Assyrian belief in magic and witchcraft. It was, therefore, naturally expected that among the vast mass of literature recovered from the buried libraries of Babylon and Nineveh some traces of the magical works would be found; and such has proved to be the case. The late M. Lenormant, in his able work *La Magie chez les Chaldéens*, and in his subsequent work on *La Divination*, dealt with the most interesting series of inscriptions which formed, as he aptly described it, the ‘Atharva Veda,’ or ‘Black Veda,’ of the Chaldeans, but the section more especially relating to witchcraft still remained untouched. In the fourth volume of the *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia* some specimens of the witchcraft tablets were published by Sir Henry Rawlinson, but no series of inscriptions were edited, nor was any definite attempt made to translate those published. Dr. Knut Tallqvist, of the Finnish University of Helsingfors, recently spent some time in England, and copied eight tablets of a series devoted entirely to witchcraft, and this important work has now been issued by the Russian Government, under the title *Assyrische Beschwörung Serie*, and is a work of great importance to students of the Old Testament. The tablets come from the royal library at Nineveh, and bear the endorsement of Assurbanipal, and so may be dated about B.C. 660. They are, however, in all cases stated to be copies of older tablets (*Kima labri šu*) from the libraries of Southern Chaldea. From statements in the tablets they seem to have belonged chiefly to the priestly schools of Ur, Larsa, Akkad or Agade, Eridu, and Sippara—all of great antiquity.

From these inscriptions we obtain a wonderful insight into the principal tenets of this religion of the ‘Black Gods,’ or the ‘gods of night’ as they are called. The first tablet opens with the words, *Alsī kunuši ilani musite*, ‘I call on you, O gods of night.’ As there was a definite priesthood attached to the gods of light, so there was a hierarchy of the gods of night. This body consisted of wizards (*Kaššapu*) and witches (*Kaššaptu*), the sorcerer (*epišu*) and sorceress (*epištu*), and various

other kinds of enchanters and wishers; and associated with them were the street workers (*elīnitu*), the harlots (*gadīstu*), the devotees of Istari, the mistress of witchcrafts, called *Istaritu*, ‘she who seizes by night,’ ‘she who slays youths,’ ‘she who spared not women,’ all which epithets amply justify the epithets applied to the goddess of Nineveh by the prophet Nahum (iii. 4). It was rather the female members of this strange priesthood whom the Chaldean feared, and against whom all his knowledge of charms and spells was required. It was this knowledge of the incantation or word and its repetition, *idi sipia*, which empowered both magician and exorcist. In the old Akkadian it is very frequently referred to in the mediatorial action of Merodach, the son of Ea, ‘thou knowest the word’ which will heal the sick one and remove the evil spell. Its power resembles, in some respect, that of the ‘writing’ in the ‘Book of the Dead’ among the Egyptians. Those who knew the prayers of the Book of the Dead, or carried with them the papyrus copy of it, were called the ‘equipped shades.’ This custom must have been of immense antiquity in Egypt, for we find it referred to in the tomb of Pepi of the Sixth Dynasty. ‘Hail to thee, Pepi, thou placest thyself upon the throne of Him who dwellest among the living, and it is the writing which thou hast, that striketh terror into their hearts.’ Some such idea, no doubt, caused the making of the Jewish *tephillim*. The whole time of a superstitious Chaldean—and most Chaldeans were inclined that way—must have been taken up in protecting himself against the various forms of witchcraft.

This is shown by quoting the following spell: ‘O my witch and my enchantress, thy frontiers all the earth, thou crossest over all mountains, I know thee, and I have taken precautions. In my broad way a watch (I set), I set a trap in my door. On the right of my gate and the left of my gate I have caused to be placed (the figures) of Lugal-gira and Allamu, the gods of the watch, (who) tear out the hearts of the wicked. The witch (*Kaššaptu*) may they slay, and I shall live.’ The close connexion between the enticements of the harlot and those of the witch are constantly referred to by Hebrew writers, and especially in Nah. (iii. 4); but there is a most curious parallel in

one of these magical tablets between *Kaššaptu* and the strange woman or harlot (הַזֵּנָה) of Prov. vii. The example is so striking that I quote the Assyrian version transliterated.

*Transliteration.*

Šiptu. Kaššaptu Mutalliktu ša suqatū  
Mutirribtum ša bitati.  
Dailtum ša birieti.  
Khaiditum ša ribāti.  
Ana makhri ša u arkiša issanakhar.  
Ina ribiti iptarās alaktu.  
Ša idlu damqu dūssu ikim.  
Ša ardatu damiqtum inīb-ša itbal.  
Ina nikilmi ša kuzūb-ša ilgi.  
Idlu ippalis-ma dūda šu ikim.  
Ardatu ippalis-ma inīb-ša itbal.  
Imurānī ma kaššaptu illika arki-ai.  
Ina imti-ša iptarās alaktu.  
Ina rukhi-ša išdikhi iprus.  
U ša-assi ili-ai u Ištari-ai ina zumri-ai.  
Ša Kaššaptu ina gullati agdari-temi ša.  
Ša episti-ai abtani zalam ša.

*Translation.*

Incantation. The witch who goes to and fro in the streets.  
The enterer of houses.  
The creeper into fortresses.  
The traverser of the broad ways.  
She turns backward and forward.  
In the broad way she has divided the way.  
She has robbed the well-favoured youth of his love.  
She has ravished the well-favoured maid of her fruit.  
Her deception has seized (them) by the glances of her eyes.  
The youth regards her, and she steals his love.  
The maiden regards her, and her fruit she ravishes.  
She has seen me, the witch, and comes after me.  
With her philtre she has divided the way.  
With her enchantment she has divided the path.  
O my god and my goddess, she shrieks for my body.  
Of the witch her utterance shame I.  
Of my enchantress I make her statue.

No. II.

1. This oppression, O oppression,  
The mighty oppression of mankind,

Which like a lion seizes hold of mankind.  
Like the drag net (*Khukhari*), it throws down heroes;

5. Like the fowler's net, it covers warriors;  
Like the snare, it captures the firstborn;  
Like the net, it covers the strong.  
Your oppression, O magician and witch,  
may the fire-god burn;  
May the fire-god eat; may the fire-god drink;
10. May the fire-god carry away;  
May the fire-god laugh at the might of your tyranny.  
For the oppression ye have made, may your bodies tremble.  
Your might, may the son of Ea, the great magician, sweep away.  
The odour of the fire-god, may it smite your faces.
15. Like an oven, may it shrivel you up;  
Like a burning coal, may it consume you.  
May the mighty fire-god cause you to be overthrown.  
Your bewitchment and your enchantment,  
may they not come near me.  
It shall disappear like a fish in dry waters;
20. Like a wild boar in miry morass;  
Like the *mastakal* plant in the overgrown field;  
Like the *kankal* plant on the bank of a pool;  
Like the *usu* seed on the sea-shore.
25. O noble Istar, the foreseer of destinies,  
. . . I am bound with a charm.  
. . . O fire-god, mighty one,  
O fire-god, the consumer, son of Anu, the warrior.

No. III.

1. Who art thou, O witch, who caused to exist the word of my evil in her heart?  
My enchantment she has made with her tongue,  
My poisoning she has made with her lips.  
By her power she has spoken it and established death.  
O witch, I seize thy mouth, I seize thy tongue;  
I will afflict thy far-seeing eyes;  
I will afflict thy swift-going feet;  
I will afflict thy out-striding knees;  
I will afflict thy delicate hands;  
I will tie thy hands behind thee.

Sin (moon-god) from in front shall seize thy body;

To the burning mass of fire and water may he throw thee.

O witch! like the circle of this signet ring,  
May thy face seethe and grow pale.

The resemblance which this extract bears to the passage in Proverbs is so remarkable that it would seem as if the two were related as common Eastern folk-lore. Indeed, it is possible to carry the parallel farther, into Egyptian literature, where, in the maxims of Ani, we read, 'Do not follow after a woman, do not allow her to seize thy heart.' The whole of the similes of the inscription and the Hebrew writing are the same. 'The traverser of the broad ways,' 'she turns backward and forward,' are often the exact equivalent of the biblical words. Indeed, these magical inscriptions enable us to suggest some alterations in the Hebrew. The passage 'the garments of a harlot,' שֵׁית זוֹנָה (Pr 7<sup>10</sup>), seems obscure, as the word שֵׁית occurs only in one other passage, Ps 73<sup>6</sup>, 'Their pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as with a garment.' In the magical inscriptions, as in Extract II., we read '*Kima šeti ukattimu garrada*,' 'like a snare or fowler's net it covers warriors.' In another passage we read, '*Kima šeti ana katame-ia*,' 'like a snare to cover me.' Now, I should propose to read net or snare in both these biblical passages, 'with the snare of a harlot,' and 'violence covers them as with a net.' Indeed, this reading perhaps throws some light on the simile in ver. 23, 'the bird hasteth to the snare.'

The passage in Extract II., 'May the fire-god eat, may the fire-god drink' (*likul lišti*), is an interesting parallel to the 'fire from heaven' eating the sacrifice and licking up the water on Mount Carmel. In Extract III. there is also a passage of much value, '*ana mišid me u išati liddikima*,' 'To the burning mass of fire and water may he throw thee.' Here *mišid* is the מִשִּׁיד of Is 33<sup>14</sup>, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?'

These remarks lead to a very interesting study of the means which were used to counteract these charms of the witch. Chief among these were fires of various kinds, and the rôle of the fire-god is particularly interesting, on account of its close resemblance to that of the 'fire from heaven'

and the 'fire of God.' It, as we see, burned up the witches and their 'enchantments,' and especially the statues and figures they made of the bewitched, and of those the latter made of their persecutors. The frequent formula at the end of these fire-charms is, 'As this statue shakes, melts, and dissolves, so may the magician and witch shake, melt, and dissolve'; which again reminds us of the biblical phrase, Ps 22<sup>14</sup>, 'My heart is like wax, it is melted'; at Ps 68<sup>2</sup>, 'As wax melteth before the fire.' There is one of these charms which throws some light on the sacrificial ritual of Chaldea, and gives a more direct proof of the use of burnt sacrifices than has hitherto existed.

O Nasku (fire-god), mighty one, prince of the great gods,  
Superintendent of the freewill offerings of all the spirits (*Igigi*),

Founder of towns and restorer of altars,

Bright light (day), whose command is supreme,  
Angel messenger (*sukkal*) of Anu, hearer of the oracles of Bel,

Listener to Bel, most high counsellor (*maliku sadu*) of the spirits.

Nasku, the consumer, the destroyer of enemies,  
Without thee the festival in the temple is not established;

Without thee, god, smells not the sweet savour (*qutrinun*).

Without thee, sun-god, a judgment judges not.

That these tablets are used as a species of litany, recited by the people, is shown by this curious rubric, if it may be called so, to be said by the afflicted—

I, So-and-so (*pulanu*), son of So-and-so, whose god is A (*pulam*), and goddess B,

I turn to thee, I seek for thee, I kiss my hands.

Underneath thee I bow down (*šapalka akmis*);

Consume thou the magician and witch;

Of my enchanter and enchantress, turn their lives to nought.

As for myself, I shall live; and thy heart, I shall thy heart make glad.'

The publication of these inscriptions has supplied a mass of material for biblical students upon a subject regarding which there was previously very little information, and it is to be hoped that further instalments may be forthcoming.