

The Traditions of the Masai.

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II.

To come now to the *traditions*: we must, first of all, lay emphasis on the fact that, however far back we go into the primitive times of any Semitic race by means of linguistic comparisons, investigation of names, and literary remains, we can always discover an accumulation of myths, which are very similar to the Bible stories (fight of the dragons at the creation of the world, the tree of Paradise and the serpent, original ancestors, flood), and, further, as their religion a moon-cult (star-cult) which might almost be described as henotheism. But we come across the same thing in a more primitive way among our cattle-nomads, the Masai, and here we must draw attention to the fact that among the oldest Semites, whom we must regard as cultivators rather than nomads, the ox, as their mythology clearly shows, must have played an important part—not small cattle, or the camel and the ass, not to mention the horse, which first became known to the Semites of Elam about 2000 B.C.

Moreover, among the Masai we come upon a series of distinctly ancient characteristics, which bring us near to the East Arabian home of the whole of the Western Semites, and which we do not encounter anywhere else very clearly except in the religion of the ancient Chaldæans (transformed later in the more polytheistically stamped religion of the Babylonians). To these belong, in the first place, the struggle of God with the dragon *Nenaunir* on the morning of the creation. Merker compares the Bab. *tiāmat* (later common pronunciation probably *tiamas*) with the word for 'dragon,' *en-diamassi* (fem.); and this is certainly not merely an accidental resemblance, since the word for 'Paradise,' *herio*, goes back to the Bab. *kirū*, 'garden,' which in the time of Hammurabi must have been sounded uncontracted *kiriū* (cf. similarly Nabû-Nebo, at that time *Nabiu*, and many other examples).¹ Now, in ancient Chaldæan astro-

¹ If *en-diamassi* in Masai also means 'fetus' or 'embryo,' here also the Arabic offers a striking analogy; cf. Arab. *el-gānn* (from *el-gānin*), 'demon,' but *el-gānin*, 'embryo.' In ancient times demons were actually thought of as dragons and similar monsters.

logy this original dragon is the female lion-headed dragon with the long neck (located in the later sign of Cancer) which appears on the seal-cylinders as a lion's or dragon's head set on a stake (her consort is the so-called vulture-dragon, the Kingu of the Bab. Creation Epic); but, according to Hollis (p. 265), *nenaunir* is called 'she of the stake,' and she was originally a lion (or half-lion, half-man, with which should be compared the Chaldæan antitype of the Twins, the Janus-headed centaur, or Sagittarius, which has a lion's and a human head). To this series of characteristics belongs also the name of the morning-star, *kilegen*, which is just the Bab. *girgilu*, 'hen'; cf. the name of Venus, *Nin-dar-anna*, 'mistress of the hen of the sky' (also masculine, corresponding to the nature of the morning-star, in contrast with that of the evening-star), *Nin-dar-a*, in Gudea, which appears in ancient Sumerian hymns as *Gašan-Gir-gi-lu* (*Cun. Texts*, xv. 23; cf. Reisner, *Hymnen*, p. 138, line 126 ff.). The sacred number of Ištar (S. Arab. masc. Astar), 15, plays a part at Masai births; among the el-Gargures (cf. the Abyss. Guragues?) race, who at one time were neighbours of the Masai, the mother, after the birth of a boy, had to remain in the hut for thirty days, and, after that of a girl, only fifteen (30 is the moon-number; cf. Bab. Sin 30, his daughter Ištar 15); cf. Merker, p. 293, where the 15 gourd-bottles with which the young man seeks the girl in marriage at her father's house should be noticed. If the three-headed serpent of Paradise was called *ol-arassumet* because it lived in the bushes (*ol-rossua*), it is tempting to think here also of a peculiarly Bab. word, namely, *rušumtu*, 'mud,' 'marsh' (the rush really grows near the latter).

As regards the character of the Masai legends, it is absolutely primitive, and in all its resemblances to Biblical stories it is an entirely independent flow from the same source. This is shown especially by the fact that almost entirely different names appear: thus Maitumbe corresponds to Adam (perhaps from a second form of Adam, *ma'dūmu* or *maidūmu*?); Tumbainot to Noah; Oschomô,

Bartimaro, and Barmáo to his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; Narabá, or its doublet Metene, to Moses (cf. Metene and Rise = Moses and Aaron); Mutari to Isaac; etc. But what has not yet been observed is the precisely similar fondness for popular etymologies which are given for every one of the Masai names in these legends. If we compare the Hebrew explanations of the names Eve (Gn 3²⁰), Cain (4¹), Seth (4²⁵), Noah (5²⁹), Abraham (17⁵), Isaac (21⁶), Jacob (25²⁶), Reuben (29⁸²), etc., down to Moses (Ex 2⁵⁰) and Samuel (1 S 1²⁰), with the meanings of names in the Masai myths, we find that these also are often very far-fetched. For instance, Naiterogob (= Eve) called her second son *Nabe* because he had moved violently in her womb (*obe*); Nairascho bore a son, and called him *Serea* because the ox which was killed by his father after the birth was spotted (*sera*). Must we not in astonishment exclaim with Adam, at this all-pervading fondness for interpreting, in some way or other, all the ancient names that were handed down: 'This is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh' (*i.e.* parallel organic higher development of a common tendency of ancient races, therefore similar disposition)? This is completely denied by sceptics, who object that missionaries (it is all the same whether of early times, *e.g.* the first Christian century or later) communicated these stories in the Biblical setting (and along with those Biblical etymologies) to the Masai, who afterwards re-modelled them according to their understanding and mental life, and therefore completely assimilated them to their own national sentiment, so much so, indeed, that they even freely imitated the interpretation of names. But this would be almost a greater wonder than the simple view advocated by Merker, that the Masai brought all these traditions with them from their ancient Arabian home, and that they (these old traditions) run parallel with the Hebrew ones, and that at the base of both there lies a former Chaldaean or East Arabian original which is lost to us.¹ This state

¹ As regards the above-quoted examples (with reference to chapter and verse only), we shall now give at least one example for those who have not an Old Testament at hand. In Gn 25²⁵ we read: 'And the first [of the twins] came forth red [*admóni*, a play upon the word *Edom*], and [rough] all over like a hairy garment [*se'ar*], and they called his name [therefore] Esau [*'esau*, in which the similarity of sound between *se'* in *se'ar* and *'es* in *'esau* was enough for the formation]; and after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel [*'akéb*]; and his name was [therefore]

of affairs is, and will certainly remain, wonderful enough; but the imageless monotheism of the savage Masai, which is disputed by nobody, is also a wonder, and is unprecedented among the races of Africa.

I now come to the traditions themselves, which Merker, in the second paragraph of his sensational fourth section, has already compared bit by bit with the corresponding features of the Biblical tradition. It must now be remarked that Merker, who, as he told me himself, had not paid any attention to the ancient stories in Genesis since his childhood, did not notice all the similarities, but overlooked some of the most important. Sellin, who himself in 1905 wrote a pamphlet on 'Die biblische Urgeschichten' (in the *Biblische Zeit- und Streitfragen*, ed. by Boehmer and Kropatschek, Lichterfelde, pub. by Edw. Runge, 1 Serie, Heft 11), drew attention, in his discussion of Merker's book in *Die Reformation*, 1905, Jahrg. iv. pp. 418-421, to the parallel between the lame Schagarda and Jacob (Gn 32²⁶). But it is a still more important fact that the Masai, exactly like the Hebrews in Gn 4, count, from the creation of the world to the Deluge, *seven ancestors*, the seventh of whom had three sons, whose correspondence with the Biblical ones the following table will make clear:

Maitumbe,	Adam.	Lemajan,	Mahujaél.
Sindillo,	Abel. ²	Learin,	Methuselah.
Serea, ³	Enoch.	Lengeni, ⁵	Lamech.
Schagarda, ⁴	'Irad.		

called *Ja'kob*.³ But, as a matter of fact, Jacob goes back to a fuller form, Jacob-el (in which God is the subject, therefore meaning perhaps, 'God follows at the heels,' *i.e.* He rewards or punishes).

² Instead of Cain. As the first murder is placed by the Masai a short time before the Flood (to give it a motive as a judgment), the story of Abel and Cain is omitted here. And it really occurs a second time in Genesis (at the end of chap. 4) by way of an allusion (cf. Jabel=Abel, Jubal=Cain, and Tubal=Naemah, as the original text probably read); but it must be observed that Sindillo has a brother Sisia, from whom the smiths are descended (Cain really means 'smith').

³ He builds the first *kraal*, as (Gn 4) Cain builds the first town for Enoch, which is called Enoch after Enoch's name.

⁴ Also OI-Ogarde, in which the similarity in sound to 'Irad (LXX Γαιδαδ for Γαιραδ) should be noticed.

⁵ *I.e.* assuming Lamkan instead of Lamech (cf. Gn 5, Kainan, instead of Gn 4, Kain). Without saying a word, I have put Lengeni instead of his brother Tumbainot (=Noah; cf. *dombo*, 'ark,' Heb. *tebah*), which is quite permissible, as Tumbainot had three sons by Naipande—Oschomó, Barti-

There is another agreement which has not been observed before, namely, the four plagues after the Deluge (Merker, p. 286 f.): (1) illness (after the first theft), (2) dung-beetles (after the unintentional killing of a sucking she-ass), (3) locusts (after the murder of a cow) followed by famine, and (4) pest (or the *urgeg*-epidemic); cf. also the augmented list of the ten plagues in Ex 7 ff., in which the four plagues of the Masai just mentioned are all represented, and—a fact to which my former pupil, Dr. Otto Weber, called my attention—for the quaternary number the four plagues in the Bab. description of the Deluge (par. 187 ff.), lions, jackals, hunger, and pest.

As regards the giving of the Ten Commandments from the Mount of God, it is characteristic of the Masai tradition that there is not a figure corresponding to Moses, who announces the sacred laws, but an angel, therefore the *mal'ak Jahweh* of the Old Testament, in the shape of a man (cf. Dn 7¹³ and Adapad, *i.e.* Marduk of Eridu, in the Bab. myth) with two wings and only one leg,¹

maro, and Barmáo (= Shem, Ham, and Japheth); but by Nahaba-Logúnja (cf. with this double name the two wives of Lamech—Ada and Zillah), the widow of his adopted brother, Lengeni; he also had other three sons (who, according to the regulations of levirate marriage, must be rightly regarded as sons)—Lesita, L'olgesan, and L'os-sero (= Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal). Therefore there also circulated among the ancestors of the Masai double reports (or myth-variants) similar to the parallel lists of forefathers among the Hebrews (Gn 4, 5). Evidently, to obtain the sacred number 7, Gn 4 chose Noah, and the Masai narrator chose Lengeni (put by me above instead of Tumbainot)=Lamech; the number 10 in Gn 5 (cf. Berosus on this point) was got by assuming God (read Edom instead of Adam) and the Divine-human mediator (Seth= $\lambda\beta\gamma\omega\varsigma$ =Adapad; cf. THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, xiv. 103-109).

¹ The description of the angel as a one-legged being may be simply the naïve expression for 'lame in the hip' or 'limping,' which at once tempts one to think of the lame fire-god of the Greeks (the Chaldaean Nebo, as Nusku-Gibil, is also a fire-god) and of Ex 37²⁰ (where, according to the right interpretation, it was not Jacob's hip that was put out of joint, but rather the angel's who wrestled with him, in spite of 37²⁰). And the hip-lame Schagarda=Irad ('*I-jrad* means 'the fire descended'; cf. Bab. *Arad-Gibil*) corresponds to Nebo-Nusku (see my pamphlet, *Die altoriental. Denkmäler und das alte Testament*,² Berlin, 1903, p. 30). The Egyptian description of Ptah and Osiris goes back to a similar idea; cf. the illustration in Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, vol. ii., between p. 130 and p. 131, in which Osiris, in the quaint mummy-like disguise, really appears to have only one leg, and carries a long sceptre, like a stick, in his hand. It should also be noticed that the eldest son of the god of heaven, *ol-Gurugur*, who appears as the

so that he could not move along except in leaps by means of a stick; he was called *ol-Dirima* (from *diriman*, 'crutch')—a name which is preserved in Arab. *darrám* ('walking with a limping gait'). Among the neighbouring race of the *el-Marimar* (cf. the Nuban race *Wa'wa'* of the Egyptian inscriptions—which by phonetic laws has arisen from *Warwar*, and is preserved in the modern name *Berber* north of Khartum) God is called *Sita* (cf. the Biblical Seth in Gn 5 and also note⁵ on p. 463, *ad fin.*), who is said to have been worshipped in the form of a human figure with only one leg, and therefore probably corresponds to this *ol-Dirima*.

I do not think that this Masai story of the giving of the Law necessarily presupposes the knowledge of the announcement by Moses of the Ten Commandments, of which the so-called Book of the Covenant is certainly the completion,² but that it was a traditional characteristic of ancient tradition long before the time of Moses that, when commandments were given by God, they were always given in the number 10, the sacred number of the Divine 'messenger' and scribe of God, Nebo;³ besides, most of the Mosaic commandments were there before Moses, and it was the mission of this man of God, who certainly belongs to history, merely to announce them to his fellow-countrymen in a new arrangement and augmented by the Book of the Covenant.

This brings me to the last point, namely, the attempt which Merker makes in the third paragraph of his fourth section to equate the Masai patriarch *ol-Eberet* with the Hebrews, and—what to me seemed fatal from the beginning—the old Masai stock, the Ameroi, with the Biblical (originally perhaps the Iranian-Hittite) Amorites. If we consider how common Arabic names of races and

mediator between God and man (Merker, *Masai*,² p. 206), recalls in a striking way the old Sumerian name of Marduk of Eridu, *Gurru-gulla* (-*dug*), in a later development *Shilig* (from *gurug*)-*gulla-dug*; but this may be an accidental resemblance, as thunder is called *ki-kurukur* in Masai, and Gurugur appears in thunder and lightning.

² With the end of the Book of the Covenant (Ex 23¹⁹=34²⁶, 'Thou shalt not seethe the kid in its mother's milk'): cf. the similar horror of eating flesh along with milk among the Masai (Merker, pp. 33 and 232).

³ Cf. Sin (the moon) 30, and his daughter Istar (Venus) 15. Šamaš (the sun) 20 and his son Nusku 10 stood in a similar relation, but Nusku is only a doublet of Nebo, which, therefore, is entirely wanting in the Bab. list of Divine numbers (K. 170).

persons like el-Âmir, 'Amâra, 'Imrân (from Amirân) are, there is not the slightest reason for connecting the Aîneroi with the Amorites, who played a part in Palestine only, and came from the north. It is far more probable that ol-Eberet, in case the Arabic al-Abrahat (Abyss. Abraha, which, it is true, is usually supposed to be the same as the Heb. Abraham), or another Arabic name with a similar sound, is not to be compared, is identical with 'Eber, the mythical ancestor of the Hebrews, while ol-Eberet's son Gerêua bears a striking resemblance to Eber's grandson *Re'û* (LXX Ρεγου, shortened from Re'û-el, Reguel) (Gn 11¹⁸); but, as the district of 'Eber-Peleg coincides with the Arabian district Jemâma, this points directly back again to East Arabia, the original home of all the Western Semites.¹

While the Masai traditions, as they at last became accessible to Merker after long effort, are always carefully guarded by a few older people, there are also among the myths generally current among the Masai, as they became known to Hollis in British East Africa, some which must be regarded as distinct echoes of the sacred myths. Among them I include what Hollis (p. 270) relates of the god Naiteru-kop (but the word has the fem. art., therefore the female beginner of the world, the first female of the country), in which, therefore, the Eve of the Masai has become a deity, while the opposite would be much more incomprehensible; the sending down of the cattle from heaven (Hollis, p. 270; cf. Merker, p. 272), and the story of Le-eyo's disobedience (Hollis, p. 271), in which I detect a faint echo of Merker's description of the Fall, which coincides so strikingly with the Bible. When we consider how widespread was the association of the tree of Paradise with the snake in the ancient East (down to the time of the Greeks), the preservation of this feature

¹ Cf. also my *Grundriss* (Munich, 1904), p. 184, A. 1.

among the Masai along with the rest is not so very wonderful.²

I close this article with the sure expectation that now, when my deceased friend's book has appeared in a second edition, the traditions of the Masai will no longer meet with the scepticism to which they were exposed when they were first divulged, but that they will be duly appreciated in their incalculable importance for the history of religion, as they deserve to be. And I repeat once more, that a Christian or Jewish influence of a former time (at all events through Christian Nuba from the third century A.D., or through the Jewish Falashas on the borders of Abyssinia), or from the older northern abodes of the Masai, is out of the question, because then—a fact which Merker had emphasized—one would necessarily have expected connexions not only with the history of the Biblical ancestors and patriarchs down to the giving of the Law, but also with the later parts of Biblical history (and especially some sort of allusion to the Gospels, in the event of Christian missionaries coming into consideration). The above-mentioned connexions with the Chaldæan traditions, and these even in points where the Bible does not show such a connexion,³ entirely do away with all doubt.

² I might, in passing, also draw attention to the fact that the name of the old medicine-man *Lesigiriätschi* (Merker, p. 289) is certainly to be compared with *i-Sigiriätschi*—the name given to the Somali by the Masai.

³ To these probably belongs the remarkable resemblance between the name of the primitive dragon (*diamassi* = *iämät*) Nenaunir, and *Ki-Nunir*, 'place of combat,' an originally mythical locality in the ancient Bab. district of the Eastern Tigris (Kvirinta of the Zendavesta, where the three-headed dragon Dahâka-Zohak was defeated; cf. also the three-headed snake of Paradise of the Masai) near Sirgulla; cf. also the pole form of the tree *e'naunir* (Merker, p. 280, and the above-mentioned (p. 462) Masai etymology of Nenaunir, with which may then be compared the Bab. *giï-ku-nir* (from *giï-ku nu-nir*), a weapon of the god Nebo, probably to be imagined in the shape of a dragon (cf. my *Grundriss*, p. 379, note 6).