

Nisroch and Nusku.

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THE word "Nisroch" occurs twice in the Old Testament as the name of an Assyrian god, in whose temple the great king Sennacherib is reported to have been murdered, while at worship, by his two sons (2 K. 19³⁷ = Is. 37³⁶, parallel passages).¹ The name Nisroch has been widely and wildly discussed. Thus, previous to the discovery of the cuneiform inscriptions, Görres (*Vorrede zum Schachnameh*, p. 97) and Jurieu (*Histoire des Dogmes et des Cultes*, T. V. tr. 4, Cap. 2) connected the form Nisroch with Arabic *nisr* "eagle." Gesenius in his *Commentar über den Jesaia* (1823), p. 975, accepted this view, and suggested that the ending *-och* was identical with that seen in the Assyro-Babylonian proper names *Arioch*, *Merodach*, *Meshach*, *Shadrach*, and *Sheshach*. He accordingly concluded that Nisroch must have been an eagle deity.

At the present day it is, of course, natural and necessary to examine the Assyro-Babylonian pantheon for the original of this god. There is no Assyrian or Babylonian deity Nisroch, but the consonantal elements of the word have led a number of expositors to look for its equivalent in the name of the Assyrian fire-god *Nusku* (cf. Sayce, *Theol. Rev.*, 1873, p. 27; Franz Delitzsch, *Calwer Bibellexicon*, 1893, p. 630; Dillmann, *Jesaia*, 1898, p. 329; Marti, *Jesaia*, 1900, p. 259, etc.; Muss-Arnolt, *Assyr. Dictionary*, p. 703).

The question is really a double one, viz.: *a.* Was the Assyro-Babylonian god *Nusku*, whose name seems to resemble the Hebrew word "Nisroch," a deity of sufficient importance in the Assyrian pantheon to justify this allusion to him in the Old Testament as being the god *par excellence* of the great Assyrian king Sennacherib (cf. בית נסרך אלדיו "in the house of Nisroch his god")?

¹ ידיו הוא משתחוה בית נסרך אלדיו ואדרמלך ושראמר בניו הקרו כורב ודמה
נמלטו ארץ אררט ומלך אסרחון בנו תחתיו;

l. Is it possible etymologically to derive the Hebrew form נִסְרוֹךְ from the Assyrian *Nusku*?

a. Comparatively little has been known until recently regarding the status and importance of *Nusku* in Babylonia and Assyria. He had a shrine in the great *Marduk*-temple at Babylon along with *Nabû*, *Tasmtum*, and *Ea* (see Jastrow, *Religion*, p. 220; Sayce, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 438; Jensen, *Cosm.*, pp. 492-494). Jastrow states (*op. cit.*, p. 220) that there is no reference to *Nusku* in the Babylonian historical texts until the Assyrian period, and cites as his reason the fact that *Nusku* is on the one hand amalgamated with *Gibil* the fire-god, and again identified with *Nabû*, who was a water-god. There can be no doubt as to the correctness of this statement. *Gibil* and *Nusku*, although originally separate developments along the same lines, are both personifications of the fire-god, and are used in such a manner in the later ritual incantations as to become practically identical.³ In the religious literature *Nusku* was the messenger (*sukkallu*) of *Bêl-Marduk* (see *ASKT* p. 76, n. 8, 6 and Br. 5683 for full references). Later, however, *Nusku* became the messenger of all the gods (see below, p. 72). He is indicated ideographically as "the god of the stylus" *Dingir PA. KU.*, which seems to point to his character as a messenger.

On the other hand, the silence of the ancient Babylonian historical texts regarding *Nusku* mentioned by Jastrow is, I think, more than counterbalanced by the existence of the name of this god in certain votive texts dating from the ancient Cassite dynasty of Babylonia. I have recently found in *OBI* i. pl. 22 ff., a number of these allusions to *Nusku* as an important deity.

I.

Thus, pl. 22, 51, on an agate cameo:

<i>Dingir Nusku</i> (PA. KU.)	To the god <i>Nusku</i>
<i>Iugal-a-ni-ir</i>	his king
<i>Ku-ri-gal-su</i>	<i>Kurigalsu</i>
<i>in-na-ba</i>	has given (this).

³ Dr. Jastrow (*Religion*, p. 221) cites as a parallel the use of the names *Samaš* and *Utu* for the sun-god. The analogy is not perfect, however, as *Utu* is simply the Sumerian, or to use Dr. Jastrow's phraseology, the "cryptographic" equivalent for *Samaš*, and is not the name of a deity other than *Samaš*, as was the case originally with *Nusku* and *Gibil* (cf. V. R. 37, 41 d'). *Utu* is also the Sumerian form for *Malik*, who was regarded in later times as the attendant on *Samaš*, but who was probably primitively *Samaš* himself.

II.

On pl. 22, 54, a lapis-lazuli disc :

<i>A-na llu Nusku</i>	Unto the god <i>Nusku</i>
<i>be-ili-šu</i>	his lord
<i>Na-si-ma-ru-ut-ta-aš</i>	<i>Nasimaruttaš</i>
<i>i-qi-iš</i>	has given (this).

III.

On pl. 23, 58, a lapis-lazuli disc :

<i>Dingir Nusku</i>	To the god <i>Nusku</i>
<i>lugal-a-ni-ir</i>	his king
<i>Na-si-ma-ru-ut-ta-aš</i>	<i>Nasimaruttaš</i>
<i>dumu Ku-ri-gal-su</i>	son of Kurigalzu
⁸ <i>aš-šib tak sagin a-(se)</i>	the lapis-lazuli disc (has given).

IV.

On pl. 23, 59, lapis-lazuli disc :

<i>A-na llu Nusku</i>	Unto the god <i>Nusku</i>
<i>sukkallu ši-i-ru be-ili-šu</i>	the exalted messenger of his lord
<i>Ka-da-aš-ma-an-tur-gu</i>	<i>Kadašmanturgu</i>
<i>aš-šib tak sagin ib-bi</i>	the shining lapis-lazuli disc
<i>u-še-piš-ma</i>	has caused to be made
<i>a-na ba-la-ši-šu</i>	for his life.

V.

On pl. 25, 64, lapis-lazuli disc :

<i>A-na</i>	Unto
<i>llu Nusku</i>	the god <i>Nusku</i>
<i>be-ili-šu</i>	his lord
<i>Ku-dur-En-lil</i>	<i>Kudur-Bél</i>
<i>i-qi-iš</i>	has given (this).

VI.

On pl. 26, 71, lapis-lazuli tablet :

<i>A-na</i>	Unto
<i>llu Nusku</i>	the god <i>Nusku</i> ⁸
<i>be-ili-šu</i>	his lord
<i>Bi-be-ia-šu</i>	<i>Bibetäšu</i>
<i>i-qi-iš</i>	has given (this).

⁸ Only the first and third of these inscriptions are in Sumerian. The other five are in the Semitic Babylonian. *Aš-šib* must mean "a disc" (see Br. 67, 71,

VII.

On pl. 26, 75, fragment of an axe in imitation of lapis-lazuli :

(broken line)

Īlu Nusku

(*Na*)-*zi*-(*maruttaš*)

dumu Ku-(*rigalzu*)

iq-ri-(*bišu*)

(*un*)-*ne*-(*nišu*)

The god *Nusku*

Nazimaruttaš

the son of *Kurigalzu*

his petitions

his supplications.

Of these seven votive allusions one dates from the reign of *Kurigalzu II.*, three from *Nazimaruttaš* his son, one from *Kadaš-manturgu*, son of *Nazimaruttaš*, one from *Kudur-Bēl*, of whom we know nothing save his name, and one from *Bibiānu*, in whose reign the Assyrian king *Tukulti-Ninib* invaded Babylonia and carried away the image of *Marduk* to Assyria. In other words, we now know that *Nusku* was a god of sufficient importance in ancient Babylonia, from 1350-1278 B.C., to justify the Babylonian monarch of the day in dedicating votive objects to his name. Moreover, the fact that the god is mentioned only by Cassite kings does not show that he was in any sense a foreign deity, as it is well known that the Cassite rulers, although foreigners themselves, adopted the entire Babylonian pantheon as their own. These allusions to *Nusku* in *OBI* prove definitely that this god was an object of royal worship in ancient Babylonia, nor is there any reason to suppose that *Nusku* was an Assyrian importation into Babylonia. Indeed, the reverse was probably the case, as it is quite clear that all the Assyrian pantheon came originally from Babylonia, even the specifically Assyrian *Ašur* (see Jastrow, *Religion*, p. 197; *JAOS.* xxiv. pp. 282 ff.).

Turning now to Assyria, we find the first noteworthy mention of *Nusku* in the royal name *Mutakkil-Nusku*, "he whom *Nusku* endows with confidence," a king who reigned *ca.* 1150 B.C. as a contemporary of Nebuchadnezzar I. of Babylon, but about whom we know very little. *Mutakkil-Nusku* has left us only a short inscription, which was translated by George Smith, *Assyrian Discoveries*, pp. 143, 251. This occurrence of *Nusku* in a king's name shows undoubtedly that the god could not have been an unim-

and Jensen, *ZA.* ii. p. 81). The *aš-šib* was an object peculiarly sacred to *Šamaš*, hence appropriate to *Nusku*, the lesser fire-deity. The emblem of *Šamaš* was a disc with four points and four streams, hence the *aš-šib* was probably a disc (cf. Prince, *JBL.* 1903, p. 35).

portant factor in the Assyrian pantheon even at that comparatively early date, although he must have been secondary to *Asur*, *Bêl*, *Rammân*, *Ea*, and *Istar*. *Nusku* also occurs (with *š* for *s*) in the proper name *Nu-ūš-ku-Malik* (Johns, *Deeds and Documents*, 20, 113, and Hoffmann, *ZA*. xi. 267, § 16). The name *Nusku* is not to be found, however, among the great gods mentioned by the Assyrian kings until the reign of *Asurbânipal* (668–626 B.C.), when we see *Nusku* in the list of that monarch's divine protectors coupled with *Nergal* (Rassam Cyl. i. 43; x. 119). *Asurbânipal* also addresses *Nusku* as "the highly honored messenger of the gods," which is probably an extension of the earlier idea that *Nusku* was especially the messenger of *Bêl* (see above, p. 69). *Asurbânipal* also refers to *Nusku* as "the one who at the command of *Asur* and *Bêlit* aids the king in overthrowing his foes" (see also Jastrow, *Religion*, p. 221).

On the other hand, Sennacherib, in whose inscriptions we should certainly expect to find *Nusku* especially glorified, if the biblical account of Nisroch is to be understood as referring to *Nusku*, passes over this deity in silence when he gives the list of his divine protectors (cf. Prism, v. 50 ff.: *anâku ana Asur Sin Samâš Bêl Nabû Nergal Istar ša Ninua Istar ša Arballi ilâni tiklia—amxursunûtima*, "I prayed to *Asur*, *Sin*, *Bêl*, *Nabû*, *Nergal*, *Istar* of Nineveh, *Istar* of Arbêla, the gods in whom I trust"). Then, too, Sennacherib lays particular stress on the protecting personality of the Assyrian *Asur*.⁴ Thus, Prism, i. 10 f.: *Asur šadû rabû sarrût lâ sandn usatlimannima*, "*Asur* the great rock lent me a kingdom without an equal." When Sennacherib begins a campaign, he says: *ina šanê girria Asur bêli utakkilannima*, "in the second of my campaigns *Asur* my lord gave me confidence" (Prism, i. 63; also iii. 42; iv. 23). All this evidence seems to indicate that, although *Nusku* undoubtedly occupied a well-defined position in both the Babylonian and Assyrian pantheons, he was distinctly a subordinate deity in the later Assyrian divine hierarchy, probably ranking below

⁴ I believe that the Bab. *An-Šar*, from which the Assy. *Asur* is commonly derived, was originally a Sumerian personification of the "host of heaven." Cf. *Anšar* and *Kišar*, "host of heaven" and "host of earth," in the Creation Legend (Delitzsch, *Weltschöpfungsepos*, p. 94). Owing to the resemblance in sound between *Anšar* and the Sem. stem נשׂר , "be good," a Semitic word-play must have taken place in Assyrian. Hence the name *Ašur*, later *Asur*, "the one who blesses," a Semitic interpretation of the original *Anšar*, whose true meaning must have been lost at an early date in Assyrian (cf. also Jastrow, *J.A.O.S.* xxiv. 282 ff.).

Nergal, the secondary god of war (so *Asurb.*, see above). It is interesting to notice that in later Babylonia the *Nusku*-cult was again revived by Nabonidus (see Muss-Arnolt, *Assyrian Dictionary*, p. 703).

b. The second aspect of the question now presents itself: Is it possible etymologically to derive the Hebrew נִסְרוֹךְ from the Assyrian name *Nusku*?

The equivalents for the Old Testament form נִסְרוֹךְ in the Greek versions are various and puzzling. We find Tischendorf Μεσεραχ (not good), B Εσδραχ , A Εσθραχ , L Ασραχ (in 2 K. 19³⁷); B Νασαραχ , Ν Ασαρακ , A Ασαραχ (in Is. 37³⁸). The Vulgate has *Nesroch* in both passages. Furthermore, Josephus, *Ant.* x. i. 5, gives the form Αρασκη . It seems probable from these variants that the *r* and final *x* (*k*) have descended from the primitive form of the word. Of the seven Greek variants, all show *r* and *x* (*k*), and two show the prefixed nasal, *i.e.* Μεσεραχ and Νασαραχ (also Vulgate *Nesroch* from Νασαραχ). Μεσεραχ in K. is not the best reading. The correct reading here is Εσδραχ . I think it is apparent from these variants that נִסְרוֹךְ is a very corrupt form which must be interpreted not in accordance with the accepted text, but rather in the light of our Assyriological knowledge. The god whose name we should naturally expect in 2 K. 19³⁷ = Is. 37³⁸ would be *Asur*, the supreme head of the Assyrian pantheon. This seems especially true when we recall Sennacherib's very marked choice of *Asur* as his divine protector, as just mentioned. Furthermore, the Greek forms L Ασραχ , Ν Ασαρακ , A Ασαραχ , B Εσδραχ , A Εσθραχ , would seem to point to such a conclusion. Owing to this coincidence, Pinches has suggested (*Hastings, Dict.* III. p. 554) that נִסְרוֹךְ is a corruption of *Asur* + *aku*. He thinks *Asuraku* is a form with final *-ku* like that seen in *Amaruduk* = *Marduku* of the later contracts = *Aku*, "the moon-god," and he compares *Arioch* = *Eriaku*, Dan. 2¹⁴ (see also Prince, *Daniel*, p. 204). He even goes so far as to cite the occurrence of the moon-god *Sin* in the name Sennacherib (*Sin-axi-irba*) in confirmation of his view. Are we justified, however, in departing so far from the biblical text as to reject absolutely the prefixed nasal which is seen perfectly in one Greek variant Νασαραχ (B in Is. 37³⁸) and less perfectly in Μεσεραχ (Tisch. in 2 K. 19³⁷, not regarded as a trustworthy form; see Brown, *Heb. Lex.*, p. 652, for variants). It is much more likely that נִסְרוֹךְ is a very corrupt hybrid form from both the names *Nusku* and *Asur*. If it were not for the Greek variants, we might choose to reject

the *r* entirely in נסרד and read נסוך = *Nusuk*,⁵ the construct state of *Nusku*. In both Assyrian and Babylonian the god-names were generally read in the construct state, as *Samaš*, *Bêl*, *Rammân*, *Nergal*, *Ištar*, etc. I am therefore inclined to see in the final *x(k)* of נסרד and of the Greek variants the remnant of the probable Assyrian pronunciation of *Nusku*, i.e. *Nusuk*, although this particular form has not been found. The Semitized Sumerian reading *nu-uz-ku*, Sb. 212, for the ideogram PA.KU.is in all probability a mere conventionalized grammatical pronunciation which was given with the ending in the regular Semitic nominative case, just as the nominative of *Samaš* is properly *Šamsu*. This idea, moreover, is apparently confirmed by the occurrence of the reading נשכ for *Nusku* on the stele of Nerab (*ZA.* xi. 238, 293 foll.), which can only point to the construct pronunciation *Nusuk*. If the word were pronounced in the nominative case we should rather expect the reading נשכו. But even if this latter theory be not accepted, it is impossible to get rid of the *n* in נסרד satisfactorily. In view of the final *x(k)*, constant in all the variants, this *n* can only be explained by the supposition that the name *Nusku* had something to do with the formation of the Hebrew form נסרד. It is highly likely also that the vocalization of the name נסוך may have been influenced by the well-known Hebrew-Babylonian name נטרד. I am strongly inclined to the view that the form נסוך crept into the original text of 2 K. 19³⁷ = Is. 37³⁶ by the hand of some copyist who, possibly wishing to show his Assyriological knowledge and also to make the text complete, inserted the vague form נסוך which had descended to him from a confused mixture of tradition, embodying the well-known *Ašur* with the less known, but not unimportant, fire-god *Nusku*. A similar mixture of tradition is seen in the existence of the fabulous "Darius the Mede" in Daniel, who arose from a confusion with Darius Hystaspes (see Prince, *Daniel*, pp. 44-56).

Zimmern's view (*KAT.*³ II. pp. 396, 417) that נסרד is a cor-

⁵ I derive the name *Nusku* from the Sem. stem *nasdku*, "set, appoint," whence *nastku*, "prince" = Heb. נסך. See also Muss-Arnolt, *JBL.* xi. p. 86; *Heb.* vii. 89, R. 17; and for the *Nusku-Nisroch* literature in general see the same author's *Assyrian Dictionary*, pp. 702-703. The epithet *papsukal* is applied to *Nusku* (*Jastrow, Religion*, p. 93). This means "divine messenger," i.e. *pap* "protector," *sukal*, lit. "one who has power" (*su* "power + *kal* "have"); *papsukal* = "powerful protector." I am convinced that in *Nusku*, itself a Semitic word, there is a play on the *s-k* element of Sumerian *sukal*, a word which is constantly applied to *Nusku*.

ruption of *Marduk* does not seem at all probable, first, because the form of מרדוך does not lend itself as readily to this theory as it does to the idea that the name is a combination-form from *Nusku* and *Asur*, and secondly, because *Marduk* is not the god whose name we should expect to find mentioned with Sennacherib.