

754TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, MARCH 7TH, 1932,

AT 4.30 P.M.

WILLIAM HOSTE, ESQ., B.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed.

In the absence of the author of the paper in Canada, Dr. JAMES W. THIRTLE kindly undertook the reading of Mr. George B. Michell's paper on "The So-called ' Babylonian Epic of Creation.'"

THE SO-CALLED "BABYLONIAN EPIC OF CREATION."

By G. B. MICHELL, ESQ., O.B.E.

SCHOLARS have assumed too hastily and on insufficient evidence that the Babylonian Epic beginning with the words *Enuma elish* was meant to be an account of the first creation of the world and of man. My object in the present essay is to show that it is nothing of the sort, but that, on the contrary, it is a mythological description of the devastation of the Babylonian system of land-irrigation by the Flood, and of its reconstruction after that disaster.

I attach less importance to the fact that the words "create" and "creation" do not occur throughout the Epic than I do to the facts that (a) the Babylonians had other accounts of a long previous creation which are incompatible with the Epic; (b) the "building" of a man to restore the worship of the gods is a minor incident, quite subordinate to the main purpose of the Epic; and (c) this main purpose has nothing to do with the primæval Creation.

1. To begin with, the Babylonian word *banah*, translated "to create" in the versions of the Epic, has not that significance either in the Babylonian or in any of the Semitic languages.

It signifies merely the mechanical operation of *building*, with no reference to the intellectual conception of the *pattern* or *plan* which must precede the mechanical operation, and which is of the essence of creation. The creation of a work of art is not the mere modelling of the clay, or the laying of pigments on canvas, or the making of black marks on paper, but the genius of the artist manifesting itself in visible or audible form. It is this that is expressed in the Hebrew word *bar'a* in Gen. i, 1, *et al.*

2. I have said that the assumption of scholars is based on insufficient evidence. I ought rather to have said on no evidence at all. For Berosus is not *evidence*. His opinions are but hearsay, at best, and even these are only to be had at third, fourth, or fifth hand, in translations of translations of translations. And "traduttore traditore"! Even if we could be sure that we had the doctrine of Berosus correctly handed down through Polyhistor, Eusebius, Damascius, George the Syncellus, etc., the opinions of a Babylonian priest of the Persian period with regard to matters some two thousand years before his time are no more infallible than those of religious sectarians of the present day. Yet there is no other reason whatever than the citations of Eusebius for supposing that the *Enuma elish* is an account of the primæval Creation.

3. There is abundant evidence that the Epic, in its present form, is not the original Babylonian theory on the subject.

When I asked Professor Pinches, with regard to his paper on "The Completed Legend of Bel-Merodach and the Dragon," (*V.I. Transactions*, vol. lix, p. 163), whether the copies made in the time of Assur-banipal (*cir.* 669—625 B.C.), had been subjected to Higher Criticism I had in mind the notes of Professor Langdon to his edition of *The Epic of Creation*. So far as I know these notes are the only attempt at such criticism. But they are sufficient to show how necessary it is. For they demonstrate clearly (*a*) that the Epic is a composite and garbled work, and (*b*) the dissension between the Sumerian priesthood and the Semitic authorities, civil and religious, with regard to certain points in it. For it contains elements which must be very much older, and of contrasting origin than its final redaction in its present form under a *Semitic* dynasty. And what evidence we have points to these disparate elements rather than to the complete Epic. Further, it is precisely these elements which relate to the creation of man.

4. That the Epic describes a secondary fabrication of a man *after the Flood* I do not dispute. But the phraseology of the Epic is ambiguous. It says, Book VI, line 23, "The great gods replied, 'It was Kingu that made war; that caused Tiāmat to revolt and joined battle.' They bound him and brought him before Ea, punishment they imposed upon him, they severed (the arteries of) his blood. With his blood he (*Ea*) made mankind in the cult services of the gods, and he set the gods free. *After Ea had built mankind and (? had imposed) the cult services of the gods upon him.*" Dr. Langdon's note to this is, "In the Nippur version the mother-goddess Aruru (Mami, Nintud) created man from clay only or gave birth to him directly, but a Semitic legend states that Mami made man from clay and blood at the order of Ea (Enki), who commanded that a god be slain and that Ninḥarsag '*ina shiri-shu u dami-shu liballil tittam,*'" (*i.e.*, "into his flesh and blood should mix clay"). "On the other hand, Marduk in this same Epic, VII, 29, is said to have created man, *ibnu ameletu*, whereas in reality he only instructed Ea to do it, and a late bilingual incantation also attributes the creation of mankind to Marduk (*ameletu ibtani*) assisted by Aruru. There were, in fact, two Sumerian traditions, one from Nippur in which the earth-goddess created man from clay, and one from Eridu in which Ea created man in the same manner. The legend of the slaying of a god and mixing his blood with clay is probably later and worked into both versions. Marduk had originally no connexion with the tale. This Aššur copy of Tablet VI does not substitute Aššur for Marduk, but is a copy from Babylonia. The version of the creation of man in Assyria has no connexion with the *Epic of Creation*. Here all the great gods assist in making man from the blood of two 'artisan gods' (sons of Ea!). In any case the legend of a god who was sacrificed to create man is extremely old." No doubt it is, but it was *Semitic*, and new in comparison with the original Sumerian version.

5. It is all very well to charge the mystagogues of Babylon with a ruthless confusion of the ancient myths. It is much more satisfactory to try to put ourselves in their position, to seek to divide out the primitive elements, and to ascertain if there is no way of reconciling them on reasonable grounds. It seems to me that my theory does this. That is to say that the myths regarding Ea refer to the original creation of man before the Flood, while that regarding Marduk's making of man from

the blood of Kingu is an exaggerated term for the restoration of civilization in Babylonia after the Flood. It may be that they were content with the story of Gilgamesh (*Utu-napishtim*), as recounting the escape of man in a "ship" from the Deluge, being probably unaware that that legend related to a very much more ancient episode, viz., to the last of those post-glacial floods which Professor Myres describes in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. i, p. 42.

6. It seems to me clear that the two ancient Sumerian traditions refer to the original creation of man from clay, whether by the Earth-goddess or by the Water-god, whereas the Semitic versions refer to a second "making" of man *after the Flood*. For that is the theme of this Epic. The latter was probably in order to induce the all-powerful Sumerian priesthood to admit the claims of Marduk, and so ascribe the initiative in the matter to the Sumerian deity, Ea. But it was the Semites who introduced the sacrifice of a god and the mixing of his blood with clay. To them also was due the idea that it was to "purchase their ransom."

7. Yet the mystic meaning attached to the episode by the Sumerian hierarchy, in order to admit it, would doubtless be in harmony with the rest of the myth. Thus, the "blood" of Kingu would signify the mud, or perhaps bitumen, ejected and stirred up by the earth movements, but disseminated over the land and stilled by Marduk, so that man might carry on the work of irrigation. For I have no doubt that this is the significance of the phrases "that he might purchase their ransom," and Ea "made mankind, in the cult services of the gods, and he set the gods free." Marduk, or whatever god it was, having overcome the rebellious powers of nature, "the gods" might now rest, and it devolved upon mankind to develop the system in peace, and to worship the gods in the proper manner. Note that it was *Ea*, the *Water-god*, who was really the agent at work in this, though the Semitic versions intrude the names of Marduk and Ashur into it. I think, then, that we can take Ea as the link between the ancient Sumerian philosophy and the upstart Semitic system which the political supremacy of the "First (or Canaanite) Dynasty" of Babylon imposed upon the old conservative hierarchy. The join was somewhat clumsily made, but, under the circumstances, it was difficult to satisfy all parties more skilfully than was done.

8. The Babylonians were perfectly familiar with a story of a great flood in which all the living people were drowned, with the exception of certain persons in a ship. They had accounts of this in documents which have survived, and the story was well known down to the latest times. Yet the *Enuma elish* does not allude to this story in the most distant way. But if it recounts the *first* creation of man where does the flood of Gilgamesh (or *Utu-napishtim*) come in? After the building of Babylon and its great temple E-sagila, which is described in the same book, the VIth, as the making of man? No hint of it is given. Yet Babylon and its temple existed continuously. They are never mentioned as having been subjected to a deluge, unless this Epic be the account of it. On the theory of the *original* creation of man the Epic has no meaning, it is contrary to the history as we know it, and to the records of the Babylonians themselves.

9. Then there is a second disparate element, which is much more ancient, of different origin, and in reality quite irreconcilable with the theory of an "Epic of Creation." I refer to the ancient myth of the contest between Ninurta and the dragons, especially the Storm-bird Zû. Here again the object is manifest, viz., to identify Marduk with the ancient theology, and so to remove an objection to his inclusion in the pantheon.

10. But this identification throws a light upon the meaning of the Epic which is not apparent on the surface of it.

The myth of Ninurta, of Nippur, the god of the spring sun (the old Sumerian war-god, and identical with Lugal banda of Erech and Ningirsu of Lagash), and Zû, is based upon the conflict between the spring sun and the demons of the winter period of storms and darkness. This myth could not, therefore, have originated in Babylonia, where there is no winter period of storms and darkness. It must have arisen in the mountainous districts from which the Sumerians originally came.

There is, however, other and better evidence that this element in the Epic is far more ancient than the redaction of the Epic itself. In a footnote to page 19 of his edition, Professor Langdon says: "The place of the mysterious bird-god Zû, the lion-headed emblem of Susa and Sumer, in Sumerian mythology is obscure. From the evidence adduced in the text above this mythological monster figured in the Sumerian and Semitic Epic of Creation as a monster in the host of Tiâmat, and as a constellation he was identified with Pegasus. . . . Scholars agree

in explaining the location of this star to the identification of the 'Storm-bird' Zû with the winter sun, for this constellation rises heliacally in the stormy season. . . . It is, therefore, certain the mythical storm-bird was associated, in astronomy at least, with the winged horse Pegasus." In fact, the evidence is complete that this episode, at least, in the *Enuma elish* is nothing but an attribution to the Semitic god Marduk of the ancient Sumerian myth of the victory of the young god of the spring sun, Ninurta, son of the earth-god Enlil, over the stormy and dark period of winter, typified by the "storm-bird" Zû, the constellation of Pegasus, which rises heliacally in the stormy season of the northern and eastern mountains. This episode, in any case, in no way refers to the original creation of the universe, but is a mere solar myth, which recurs every spring season.

11. There is also astronomical evidence of a much earlier date for this element in the *Enuma elish*. This is given in p. 19 of Dr. Langdon's work—supported by a note to p. 26, regarding the heliacal rising of the constellation of Taurus at the spring equinox, that is, before 1900 B.C. "Naturally the star Aldebaran was associated with the beginning of spring before 1900 B.C.," when he is of opinion that the epic was written. "Later the mean solar year was fixed by the rising of Alpha in Aries. But the date for the festival remained unchanged."

12. No doubt the Semitic legends which were afterwards worked up into this Epic existed as early as the First Babylonian Dynasty. But I can find no evidence that the Epic was *written* so early as 1900 B.C. I think Dr. Langdon founds his opinion of this date on evidence that applies rather to the Sumerian element. He states (p. 11), "The reaction of the Epic upon art in all periods after its composition, about the twenty-second century, is undeniable. The problem here is chronological, and from this point of view the reliefs of Agum-kakrime are important. They constitute at present the only direct evidence of the existence of this great poem before the actual texts which contain the legend. There is in the literature of the First Dynasty no reference to the Epic at all. But an earlier Sumerian poem of a similar kind existed, which inspired the Semitic poem, a problem which remains to be examined."

I bow with great deference to the authority of Dr. Langdon. But here I venture to point out that the reliefs of Agum-kakrime are far from conclusive proof. This king, who reigned from

about 1648 B.C. for an unknown period, was a Kassite, not a Semite. The priesthood was Sumerian, and the reliefs relate to the ancient, Sumerian, parts of the legend. They afford no evidence of the Semitic parts of it. Indeed, we have nothing to show that the Epic existed in a form from which the Creation story in Genesis could have been borrowed already in the middle of the fifteenth century B.C., the time when Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

13. The conclusion is then, I think, imperative, namely, that the theory that the *Enuma elish* is an "Epic of Creation" is founded on a confusion between the conflict of the "upper" and "lower" gods, as related in it, and the much earlier, and totally irrelevant, conflict between the spring sun and the stormy and dark period of winter, which occurs annually, and which could not have arisen in Babylonia, where there is no stormy and dark winter.

14. I come, then, to the alternative suggestion that the Epic relates, in fact, to the destruction of the system of land-irrigation in Babylonia by the Flood, and its subsequent restoration by "Marduk."

15. To my mind this word "restoration" is the key-note of the whole Epic. It occurs in Tablet IV, lines 11 and 12, where it is stated of Marduk, "*restoration* is the need of the chambers of the gods. (And so) thy place has been fixed wherever there are shrines. Thou Marduk art our avenger." But before restoration there must be some account of the events which have made restoration necessary. So we have the preliminary narrative of the great attack of the "lower" gods on the "upper" gods and the dismay produced in the latter by the havoc wrought.

16. Positive and material evidence of an immense and long-lasting inundation of the lands lying about the Lower Euphrates has at last been discovered, which completely and finally sets at rest all doubt of the historicity of the Babylonian records of a great flood. Whether the Flood, the vestiges of which were found in 1928 and 1929 by Messrs. Woolley and the Oxford Field Museum Expedition at Ur and Kish respectively, be that of Gilgamesh, as appears to be likely,* or that of Noah, which I

* See R. P. Dhorme's article on "Le Déluge Babylonien" in the *Revue Biblique* for October, 1930, pp. 481 ff.

doubt,* the fact remains the same that an inundation occurred in Chaldea which utterly destroyed the whole of the civilization then existing there, and that it was followed long afterwards by a reconstruction on new lines. *All this was within historical times*, and, therefore, certainly ages after the first "creation" of man, whether according to the Babylonians themselves, or according to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Since the entire habitability, and consequently in a still greater degree the civilization, of Mesopotamia depends as much on *irrigation*, and the curbing and canalization of the Euphrates and the Tigris as Egypt depends on the Nile, it would be strange if the local populations, while they conserved records that show how deeply they were impressed by the disaster, preserved no account whatever of the enormous operations involved in its repair. I maintain that we have this in the *Enuma elish*, which was an important factor in the long New Year's festival of Nisan at Babylon.

17. The fact that some fifteen feet of mud was piled up by the deluge to which I refer in the last paragraph is sufficient proof that *the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris had even at that time no outlet to the sea*. This latter fact had already been established by Sir William Willcocks.† The huge bank built up by the Rivers

* While the story of the escape of Gilgamesh in a "ship" is obviously derived from that of Noah and the Ark, the *Flood* in question was, I think, an earlier one, of far longer duration. I found this opinion on the Biblical chronology. This places the Deluge of Noah at 2522-1 B.C. and it lasted only 358 days, from the beginning of the rain to the drying of the ground. Mr. Woolley places the inundation of Ur before the thirty-eighth century B.C. Père Dhorme agrees with M. Weidner that the data on which Woolley bases this estimate should not be dated earlier than the twenty-eighth century. Dr. Langdon is more moderate in placing the inundation of Kish at about 3300 B.C., and Père Dhorme agrees with him. I am absolutely certain of the accuracy, to a year, of the Biblical chronology set forth in my *Historical Truth of the Bible*. It has never yet been seriously examined, much less refuted, and it harmonizes exactly every item both of the Biblical and the secular history, and fails in none. It is surprising to me that lovers of the Bible should neglect so sure a test of the truth.

† See his *From the Garden of Eden to the Crossing of the Jordan* (E. & F. Spon, London, 1920). The argument from the present rate of deposit of alluvium, calculating from the foundation of Mohammerah in the time of Alexander the Great, is perfectly worthless. For that city was built on *Karun* mud, and is situated on the Karun itself, and the alluvium deposited in the delta at the head of the Persian Gulf was brought down by the Kerkha and Karun from the opposite direction from the Euphrates. The mud of the latter river, and of the Tigris, was left behind in Babylonia, and nothing was left to build either a bar or a delta.

Karun and Kerkha from the mountains on the east and north-east effectively prevented the outflow of water from the low-lying marshes of the district about Ur and Eridu into which both the Euphrates and the Tigris then emptied themselves. The Tigris then flowed down what is now the Shatt el-Hai, or Gharraf, and fell into the Lower Euphrates at Ur. It was comparatively lately that it broke through the bank at Kut el-Amara and took its way into the great Susiana marsh, or shallow lake, through which it now flows. Consequently, neither "Tiâmat" nor "Apsû." can possibly stand for the salt sea. *Tiâmat* stood for the *subterranean* depths from which the springs were supposed to be derived, and *Apsû* for the surface floods.

18. The following is a plain, common-sense interpretation of the whole myth.

The poem opens with a description of the early conditions, under the figure of "gods," derived from the union of the work of the subterranean waters, "Tiâmat," and that of the surface floods, "Apsû." At first, the waters were free and unrestrained and there were no products of civilization. They produced the lazy, indifferent, god, Lakhmu (Arabic ^ل_ل^خ_م), and his female counterpart. But these, in turn, produced Anshar and Kishar, "the host of heaven" and "the host of the earth." These, again, produced Anu, the heaven-god, Ea (or Nudimmud) the water-god, "equal to Anu," and Enlil, the earth-god (though this latter is not mentioned in this part of the poem). In time these gods began to organize things in Mesopotamia, commencing by restraining the annual inundations (Apsû), to their own great satisfaction (line 24), but to the great indignation of the waters thus held in check. The floods had been in undisputed possession. The inundation and the noisy elements ("Mummu") are represented as going to the underground sources, "Tiâmat," from which they derived so much of their force, to complain of the disturbance of their universal sway (lines 29-40). "Apsû the flowing and ebbing but limitable fresh-water lake, appeals to Tiâmat the illimitable and ever moving flood, to help him to overthrow the beneficent work of the gods, who were so ordering the world that such rest as he took was banished from him!" (Willcocks.)

But Ea, the wise and skilful god of irrigation, perceived the plan of Apsû and Mummu (line 60), overcame and slew them both,

and fixed upon Apsû his dwelling (line 71). This is, no doubt, primarily a reference to the temple at Eridu.

Tiâmat, finding that her sway was disputed and her consort Apsû was subdued, rebels against the restraint and organizes the constellations that were supposed to rule the atmosphere, and to produce rain, hail and thunderstorms (lines 128 to 145). She then exalts "Kingu" and takes him as her second husband. "Kingu" I take to be earth-movement, such as the geology shows to have occurred at Hit, spreading mud and bitumen over the land. "All the fountains of the great deep were broken up." Anshar, "the host of heaven," is depicted as unable to cope with this emergency, so he sends his son Anu (II, 71-80) to remonstrate with Tiâmat. The heaven-god, however, flees in terror. Ea too, the water-god (in the character of Nudimmud) (II, 58), cannot face her. Eventually Marduk, the young god of the spring sun, typifying, of course, evaporation, gains the victory, but not until the floods have been stopped by embankments. Book IV describes his weapons and then the great combat.

In line 35 there is, perhaps, a reminiscence of the rainbow. Lines 95 to 122 describe the combat and the victory of Marduk. "The lord spread out his net and enmeshed her." That is to say, he made a network of canals and dykes which broke up the floods, so that they could be dealt with piece-meal. Taking advantage of the winds (lines 42-49, and 98-100), when they blew against the current, he made dams to hold up the water and turn it into other channels. Thus, by splitting it up into various streams (lines 101, 102), he overcame the force of the rushing rivers. "They were encircled by restraint, so that it was not possible to flee. He bound them and broke their weapons. Into a net were they thrown and in the snare they sat down." Line 119, "And Kingu who had become chief among them he bound and he counted him with the god Diggû" *i.e.* Nergal, the god of the underworld. Then "unto Tiâmat whom he had bound he returned again. The lord trod upon her hinder part, with his toothed sickle he split her scalp. He severed the arteries of her blood. The north wind carried it away into hidden places." That is to say, he constructed the great dam across the Tigris so that the upper waters were held up and turned over the conglomerate and down the Shatt el-Gharraf, while the lower waters, cut off and driven by the north wind, were lost in the marshes to the south-east.

Line 137. "He split her into two parts like a mussel. Half of her he set up and made the heavens as a covering. He slid the bolt and caused watchmen to be stationed. He directed them not to let her waters come forth." In these poetic terms we have the dividing of the waters of the Euphrates from those of the Tigris by the great dam across the Sakhlawia branch—a dam which, of course, it was of the utmost importance to keep in repair.

After crossing the skies and pacing out the spaces, apparently as an abode for the heaven-god, Anu, he set out the foundation of a temple on the water-level, or "face of Apsû," at Eridu, as the abode of Ea-Nudimmud (line 142). As a counterpart of the same, of identical dimensions, he fixed a temple, "E-sharra," at Erech, as an abode for Enlil.

Eridu and its temple were built in the midst of the wide overflow of fresh water when the Euphrates was flowing wide like a sea, as it traversed the great overflow. The beginning of habitable earth in it was ushered in by the growth of reeds in the open water and the appearance of marsh-land. Then the work of land reclamation was begun in the overflow by the placing of bundles of reeds on the face of the water, and the piling up of earthen banks behind them, in order to form enclosures within which the water dried up. The land was then cultivated, and irrigated by free flow. This, of course, is that which is typified by that part of the ritual of the fifth day of the New Year celebrations which consisted of laying a bundle of reeds in a trench in the temple court. See Langdon's *Epic of Creation*, pp. 26, 30, and probably also the "muddy waters" of pp. 45 and 55 (23). Langdon notes that the "E-sharra," *i.e.*, "House of the Universe," at Erech is a name for the Earth, and a synonym of E-kur, and later a part of it, the temple at Nippur. Thus Marduk caused the Great Three, Anu, Enlil and Ea, to occupy each his own abode.

Thus, it seems to me, Dr. Langdon's commentary on the Epic is the satisfactory explanation of its purpose and sources, while my own theory, based on that of Sir William Willcocks, is the common-sense view of its meaning and doctrine, and offers the solution of its discrepancies.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. W. Hoste), in proposing a vote of thanks to the author of the paper, regretted his absence in Canada. He