

Trastevere, near the Portese Gate; but from there they passed, bit by bit, to this side of the river, and thence, later (1555), to the area lying between the Tiber, Portico di Ottavia, S. Angelo in Pescheria, and the quarter of Regola; they would be enclosed in the Jewish quarter by Pope Paolo IV.

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## COINCIDENCES OF HEBREW AND CUNEIFORM LITERATURE.

By JOSEPH OFFORD.

THE increasing accuracy with which the cuneiform-inscribed literature of Babylonia and Assyria is now being translated permits the versions of their numerous texts as now edited by specialists to be confidently utilized for purposes of comparison with the writings of their neighbours, the Jews, a people of such supreme interest to us. The results of such a study are very valuable for illustrating the Old Testament authors by revealing to us their mental standpoint, and thus tending to prove that their works were contemporary productions with those of Mesopotamian authors of their era which have been preserved. The most important of the larger fragments of the cuneiform works throwing light upon the Old Testament books have been published *in extenso* in popular form, but there are some minor matters of similar character, elucidated by cuneiform literature, which are of much interest, and a few of them are briefly summarized in the following notes.

In Habakkuk iii, 3-6, omitting words unnecessary for our present purpose, occurs the following sentence:—"God came from Teman and Paran (the sultry southern desert of Chour, and cavernous scorching rocky hills therein)" having rays at his side, "Before Him went (the) Pestilence<sup>1</sup>; and fever-glow<sup>2</sup> goeth forth at His feet." The pestilence demon, as God's emissary, was very familiar to Babylonian ideas. Thus the last (or imprecatory clause) of Hammurabi's Law Code says: "May there come upon him an evil

<sup>1</sup> See Deuteronomy xxxii, 24, "They shall be devoured with burning heat." Margin, "scorching fever."

<sup>2</sup> Or fiery darts.

pestilence which cannot be cured: like the *bite of death* cannot be removed."

In passing, one cannot fail to notice the striking similarity between the final words of this sentence and the concept in the Book of Job where Bildad says: "His strength shall be hunger bitten. The first-born of death shall gnaw (bite) him." This thought of the "bite of death," a Semitic concept, is, of course, the progenitor of Paul's triumphant query "Where is death's 'fang,' or sting. Returning to the consideration of Habakkuk's description of Pestilence marching before God, this is a similar view of the personality producing disease with that of the pest deity of Assyria and Babylonia, who is to be equated with the dreaded Rešeph of Syria.

The Old Testament use of the word Rešeph,<sup>1</sup> a term identical with the Syrio-Aramaic deity name, shows how precisely parallel was the thought-basis in each case. In Psalm lxxviii, 48, Rešeph is the lightning or thunderbolt, precisely as in Habakkuk's account of God having rays at his side symbolic of the lightning, with pestilence and fever as His companions. Thus, in Job v, 7, the fiery darts (or sparks) which fly upward are the fever shafts from Sheol rising, bearers of disease, death, and evil. To the Babylonians the pestilence and plague deity, as denizen of the shades, was symbolized by another god Dibbara, demon of devouring, mysterious epidemics. Dibbara may be connected with Deber, the "pestilence," of Sheol, the "house of death." The almost certain identity of Rešeph, the Syrio-Aramean deity with Ramman, or Rimmon, of Assyria, who in his images is depicted with the lightning, or burning dart, is another link of these old worships with Old Testament writers, for Rešeph=Rimmon is the Cyprio-Greek<sup>2</sup> Apollo, whose arrows were the scorching sunshafts of autumn—the time of fevers and illness—and the lightning, whilst his more earthly weapons or agents were plagues and epidemics.

To Apollo Smyntheus, as god of pestilence, were presented votive mice as offerings, and probably rats: the connection of such animals with disease was known to the ancients and is, doubtless, alluded to

<sup>1</sup> See in a recently found Phoenician inscription from Sidon, of Bod Astart, the district of Rešeph, רֶשֶׁפֶן אֲסְטָרְתָּא.

<sup>2</sup> See the Cypriote inscription identifying Apollo with Rešeph. For representations of the Syrian Rešeph upon Egyptian monuments see W. Spiegelberg, "Neue Rescheph Darstellungen," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 1908, 529-531. With plate presenting four instances.

in the story told by Herodotus, II, 14, of the destruction of Sennacherib's army by a plague of rats, thus directly agreeing with the modern view as to these spreaders of contagion. In 1 Samuel vi, 4-5 and 17-18, the occurrence of plague is distinctly connected with the mice in Philistia. The Philistines, for a prophylactic, accordingly dedicated offerings in the form of mice to their god Rešeph Apollo.<sup>1</sup> These were by them placed inside the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant, together with models of the so-called emerods, perhaps copies of the grievous boils of the bubonic plague (1 Sam. vi, 4 *seq.*, 17 *seq.*). Confirmation of the accuracy of this story was provided some years ago by the discovery of silver votive mice in a river near Sidon. Also Punic, or Phoenician, monuments have mice carved upon them.<sup>2</sup> Precisely as recent research concerning the spread of disease by rodents is found to be alluded to in the Old Testament and ancient authors, so also the potent part, played by flies and mosquitoes, in similar dissemination of contagion, is quite Biblical.

When Ahaziah was seized by sudden illness he sent to enquire concerning it to Ekron, the site of a shrine of Baal-zebug "the Lord of Flies," evidently because his malady was supposed to be connected with, if not produced by, these insects (2 Kings i).

We possess corroborative evidence that the deity of Ekron was one who had the power of protection against the conveyance of disease by flies, because the Talmud—although apparently the author of the passage was unaware of the object for which it was done—tells us that the Ekronites made little images of flies, carried them upon their person, and sometimes kissed them.<sup>3</sup> The Talmud also connects the Baal-berek of Shechem with the Baal-zebug of Ekron, and repeats that the latter was a fly deity.

That the Old Testament writers can be now further illustrated from cuneiform sources is evidenced again in connection with Ramman, the thunderstorm, and hot fever-wind deity. In Assyria the lightning bolt was his emblem, and he was designated Barqu, the lightning's dart, or flash, hence the Hebrew Baraq, lightning. Prof. Sayce explains that Ramman was an amalgamation of the Wind-god and the Air-god. The Martu deities, of whom a cuneiform

<sup>1</sup> Arsuf, near Jaffa, in the Rešeph littoral, is the Arabic, *أرسوف*; the Greek, *Απολλωνία*.

<sup>2</sup> See *Corpus Inscr. Semit.*, II, 344.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek equivalent Josephus gives for the Ekron deity is *Μυιά* and the LXX *βιάλ μυϊαν θεον* 'Ακκαρών: *μυία* corresponds to Zebub.

hymn says: "They are the evil winds, messengers of the pestilence demon, are they." The plague weapon of Ramman (Rešeph) by the Euphrates and Tigris, was the hot, stifling, fever-blast of autumn, counterpart of the scorching Southern desert wind of Palestine, he having been, a tablet tells us, *Uta-edina-gúba*, "the scorching desert sun."<sup>1</sup> His burning disease was promoted by the hot wind of the waste. The Biblical and Syrian Rešeph=Apollo=the Assyrian Ramman (or Rimmon) is shown as a Hittite deity standing, thunderbolt in hand, upon the great Hittite stele not yet deciphered, found by Herr Koldewey at Babylon.

We return now to Bildad's threat that "the first-born of death shall bite him." This personification was a "pestilence demon" rising up from Sheol as from a charnel house. This concept of many descriptions of diseases and epidemics being propagated by evil spirits in Sheol, and thus rising up from that subterranean Hades as the ghost ascended at Endor, from Sheol, "the pit," "death's abode," in Assyrian, the Kigallú, or Arallú, is very Chaldean.<sup>2</sup>

Nergal and Eriskigal, god and goddess of the "Enfers," used to release, or let up, the disease demons. It was a repository of maladies. So Eriskigal, its denizen, desiring to curse Ishtar, the Babylonian Astarte, ordered her "messenger," the minor deity Namtar, progenitor of Hermes, as psychopomp of the Shades, to inoculate her with 60 (a *šoss*) of diseases. Thus Hosea xiii, 14, reproducing in Hebrew phraseology the idea of sickness emanating from Sheol, says: "O! death, I will be (or where are?) thy plagues. O! Sheol, where is thy destruction?"<sup>3</sup>

Job's censor, Bildad, whose name may be a compound of Bel (Merodach), seems specially saturated with Mesopotamian ideas. He blames Job (xviii, 8) for getting entangled in a net, but the patriarch explains that God had compassed (or noosed) him with His net.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See remarks upon Habakkuk iii, on page 141.

<sup>2</sup> The Old Testament peopled Sheol with deities, see 1 Sam. xxviii, 13, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth." So Ishtar, when in the Underworld, told the gatekeeper if he did not let her out she would break open the gate and then the dead, let loose, would ascend and devour the living.

<sup>3</sup> Job xxvi, 7, "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place and hangeth the earth upon nothing," shows the thought that the earth had beneath it an empty chaos, and in its bowels were Sheol and its demon habitant Abaddon. See Revelation ix, 1.

<sup>4</sup> In Job xxvi, 11, the heavens are stated to be supported upon pillars, as was the view of the Cosmos in ancient Egypt.

This concept of disease and consequent death, as also death by war or accident, is in cuneiform literature frequently termed being dragged down to the grave, or spoken of as being thrown into the earth by the "Net of Dread Destiny of the gods." The pestilence deity possessed a special net, and was, as we have seen, Nergal, a tenant of Sheol. Therefore invocations to a god begging not to be entangled in the net of sickness, or, if so caught, to be released therefrom, are chiefly addressed to him as Inferno's lord.<sup>1</sup> Nergal's netcraft was so dire that he could even enmesh the gods and drag them to his dark domain. The goddess Nin Sonu, thus held in the Underworld, asks help of Bel, and that high deity himself when caught sought Sin's assistance for his plight.<sup>2</sup>

Before discussing further this dreaded net, an Old Testament reference to this weapon of man, and also of the members of the Chaldean pantheon, should be referred to. The correct translation of Habakkuk i, 15-16, in connection with the use of nets in battle, as by gladiators in later times, says, probably thus: "The Chaldeans capture them in their nets and gather them in its meshes (or drag). Then they rejoice and exult and therefore sacrifice to their net and burn incense to its cordage (or sein). Shall they be permitted to again (therein) swallow up the people without pity?"<sup>3</sup> This is an allusion to the famous "battle net of the gods" adored in the Babylonian temples. It was symbolical of the Net of Destiny of the deities: a weapon used in the holy war of the gods—that "drag" with which Merodach had defeated Tiamat in the campaign of heaven.

In a hymn to the Babylonian god Nirig, the chanter says of him: "I bear aloft the battle net from which no mountaineer has escaped." But, in Mesopotamia, prayers and incantations were oftener addressed to another net, the net (or drag) of Nergal and other destructive deities: the net which captured humanity, and by death drew them down to the doom of the Sheol Underworld, the

<sup>1</sup> In Père Dhorme's *Choix de Textes Cuneiformes* are many petitions of this description, 321 3-7, 321 3-65.

<sup>2</sup> See the Book of Tobit (a work written subsequent to the Captivity, and which may contain copies of Assyrian expressions, especially when referring to Ahikar, vizier of Sennacherib), xiv, 10, where it speaks of "escaping the snare of death, or falling into the same to perish."

<sup>3</sup> That the concept of Habakkuk concerned a net to enthrall human beings is indicated by what he writes in the previous verse, "Thou makest men as the fish of the sea," meaning as held down by the net of fate.

loathsome home of disease and misery, where, even if part of its region where dwelt the Shades was not so terrible, and was called Irsitu, it was a melancholy place like the Greek  $\chi\theta\upsilon\rho$ . A title for it in its entirety, as has been mentioned, was Kigallu, which has been rendered "Great Earth." If so, then Eriskigal, its divine queen, was "Lady of the Great Earth."

The Assyrians and Babylonians conceived of it as lying at a great depth, because Nebuchadnezzar, in one of his numerous architectural inscriptions, boasts that to ensure the permanence of one of his sacred edifices, he caused the foundation pits to be so deeply dug that they "descended to the bosom of Kigallu." Nabopolassar made the same boast concerning the E-temen-an-Ki, or Tower of Babil (*see* Langdon).

The denizens of the dead domain were in a sort of purgatory, for a cuneiform writer tells us of them: *Nuruul in-na-ina etute ašba*, "Light they see not, in dense darkness they sit." To be caught in the net was a fearsome fate, reserved for the wicked, and so a subject of lament to an Assyrian, as to a Hebrew, his kinsman, hence Psalm xviii, 4 and 5. "The snare of death entangled me (or compassed me), the net of Sheol seized me," and Psalm cxvi, 3, says: "The cords of death enwrapped me."<sup>1</sup>

The Psalmist's description of death's snare is pictorially illustrated in a very ancient Babylonian relief known as the "Vulture Stele." Upon it we have persons gathered in a great net, and the god Enlil executing them with a massive mace, they thrusting their heads through the mesh in vain efforts to escape. The relief bears a cuneiform text which MM. Thureau-Dangin and Heuzey, in their final edition of the monument, tell us is a record of the fixation of the boundary between the territories of Eannatum, king of Lagaš, and the people of Ourina. Its being duly respected is guaranteed by invocation of the gods thus worded: "Ceux qui seront perjures au serment prêté, qui le filet des dieux s'abattu sur eux."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Escape was once, at least, achieved, for Tammuz, when imprisoned in the Underworld, evaded its encircling net, and hence is called "Lord of the Net."

<sup>2</sup> S. A. Mercer, in "The Oath in Cuneiform Inscriptions," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1913, p. 48, says of this relic: "The King's Oath is sworn by the Sulgal, net of Enlil (Bel), of Ninharsag, and of Enki (Ea); the oath was taken in the camp, and if broken the penalty was that the net would slay its perjurer." The idea of a divine vengeance net was known in ancient Egypt, for in the magnificent funerary papyrus "Book of the Dead" of Iouiya, there is a rare vignette of his soul, or *Ka*, escaping from the dread net of the Underworld. Reference in cuneiform texts to the warrior's net may be found in

Though escape was so impossible to mortals, some evil spirits were imagined to emanate from the Kigallu, and in order to be rid of such they had to be got back there again. Thus, in Mr. Thompson's collection of texts concerning *Demons and Evil Spirits* (Vol. I, p. 109), an incantation is provided compelling such a spirit to descend into the earth. Necromancers and witches could, temporarily, evoke a spirit up from the Shades, and such a ghost was called Šūlu, "the rising one." The operator was entitled Mušelu, "he who causes to rise." With similar idea the witch of Endor, in Samuel, asks "Whom shall I bring up?"<sup>1</sup>

One cause of the dread of Sheol into which the death net immured the lost was that it was a "land of no return." As a writer in cuneiform says of it, it was "The house from which those who enter come not forth."<sup>2</sup>

A term closely reminiscent of Job xxx, 23, where death is spoken of as "The house appointed for all being." The Babylonian and Assyrian writers always allude to the route to the grave as being a descent, and therefore speak of coming forth from Kigallu as an ascent. So Job speaks of them that "go down to the bars of the pit."<sup>3</sup>

To attain the release of the souls from their prison, according to the Old Testament, it requires the omnipotent Jehovah. He is that One who can "bring out the prisoners from the prison: them that sit in darkness, out of the prison house." He is One that will "say to the prisoners go forth, and to them that sit in darkness show yourselves," or who "proclaims the opening of the prison to them that are bound."<sup>4</sup>

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the Rassam Cylinder, line 56, giving us Assurbanipal's description of his capture of Babylon. Speaking of those who did not permit themselves to be burnt to death with their monarch, Samaš-šum-ukin, in the palace, the historian writes:—"The net of the mighty gods, my lords" (the king's favourite deities) "from which no one escapes, overwhelmed them: not one escaped, no rebel evaded my hands."

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Samuel xxviii, 13, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth," and v. 14, "An old man cometh up." The Assyrian verb above corresponds to that used in Hebrew, עלל.

<sup>2</sup> Dhorme, *Choix de Textes*, 213, 327. See also Job vii, 9, "He that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more."

<sup>3</sup> For similar Bible expressions see Psalm xxviii, 1: "They that go down to the pit"; also Psalms xxx, 9, and cxliii. Ezekiel xxvi, 20, speaks of the "descent into the pit of the people of old time in the lowest parts of the earth."

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah xlii, 7; xlix, 9; and lxi, 1.