

THE BABYLONIAN STORY OF THE CREATION ACCORDING TO THE TRADITION OF CUTHA

TRANSLATED BY THE EDITOR

BESIDES the story of the Creation in a series of successive acts, Mr. George Smith brought to light the fragments of two tablets containing another legend of the Creation which varied very considerably from it. The tablets belonged to the library of Assur-bani-pal at Nineveh, but the colophon informs us that they had been copied from older documents which came from the library of Cutha, now Tel Ibrahim, in Babylonia. The text has never been published, but a translation was given of it by Mr. Smith in his *Chaldean Genesis*, and a revised version by myself in the *Records of the Past*, vol. xi. As much progress has been made in cuneiform studies during the ten years which have elapsed since the latter was published, I now give another translation of the inscription, embodying the improvements which our increased knowledge of the Assyrian language has enabled me to make.

The Cuthæan legend, it will be observed, knows

nothing of a creation in successive acts. Chaos is a period when as yet writing was unknown. But the earth already existed, and was inhabited by the chaotic brood of Tiamat, imperfect first attempts, as it were, of nature, who lived in a city underground. They were destroyed, not by Merodach, the god of Babylon, but by Nergal, the patron-deity of Cutha, who is identified with Nerra, the god of pestilence, and Ner, the mythical monarch of Babylonia who reigned before the Deluge. The words of the poem are put into the mouth of Nergal, and the poem itself was written for his great temple at Cutha.

The legend of Cutha agrees better with that reported by Bêrôssos than does the legend of the Epic. In both alike we have a first creation of living beings, and these beings are of a composite nature, the offspring of Tiamat or Chaos. In both alike the whole brood is exterminated by the gods of light.

The date to which the legend in its present form may be assigned is difficult to determine. The inscription is written in Semitic only, like the other creation-tablets, and consequently cannot belong to the pre-Semitic age. It belongs, moreover, to an epoch when the unification of the deities of Babylonia had already taken place, and the circle of the great gods was complete. Ea, Istar, Zamama, Anunit, even Nebo and Samas, are all referred to in it. Possibly it may be dated in the age of Khammuragas (cir. B.C. 2350).

THE CUTHÆAN LEGEND OF THE CREATION

COLUMN I

Many lines are lost at the commencement.

2. His word (is) the command of the gods . . .
3. His glancing-white instrument (is) the glancing-white instrument (of the gods).
4. (He is) lord of that which is above and that which is below, the lord of the spirits of earth,
5. who drinks turbid waters and drinks not clear waters ;
6. in whose field that warrior's weapon *all that rests there (?)*
7. has captured (and) destroyed.
8. On a tablet he wrote not, he opened not (the mouth), and bodies and produce
9. he caused not to come forth in the land, and I approached him not.
10. Warriors with the body of a bird of the valley, men
11. with the faces of ravens,
12. did the great gods create.
13. In the ground the gods created his city.
14. TIAMAT gave them suck.
15. Their progeny¹ the mistress of the gods created.
16. In the midst of the mountains they grew up and became heroes and
17. increased in number.
18. Seven kings, brethren, appeared as begetters ;
19. six thousand (in number were) their armies.
20. The god BA-NINI their father (was) king ; their mother
21. the queen (was) MELILI ;

¹ *Sasur.*

22. their eldest brother who went before them, ME-MANGAB¹
(was) his name ;
23. (their) second brother, ME-DUDU² (was) his name ;
24. (their) third brother, [ME-MAN]PAKH (was) his name ;
25. (their) fourth brother, [ME-DA]DA (was) his name ;
26. (their) fifth brother, [ME-MAN]TAKH (was) his name ;
27. (their) sixth brother, [ME-RU]RU³ (was) his name ;
28. (their seventh brother, ME-RARA was) his name.
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COLUMN II

Many lines are destroyed.

1. . . . the evil curse
2. He turned his word
3. On a I arranged
4. On a tablet the evil curse he *wrote* (?)
5. In I urged the augurs on.
6. Seven against seven in breadth I arranged (them).
7. I set up the holy *reeds* (?).
8. I *prayed* to (?) the great gods,
9. ISTAR, . . . , ZAMAMA, ANUNIT,
10. NEBO, . . . , (and) SAMAS the warrior,
11. the son (of the Moon-god, the . . .) of the gods my
couriers.
12. he did not give, and
13. thus I spake to my heart
14. saying: Verily it is I, and
15. never may I go . . . beneath the dust!
16. never may I go . . . the prayer.
17. May I go when the son . . . my heart ;
18. and may I renew the iron, may I assume the black
garment.⁴

¹ "The voice" or "thunder strikes." The Accadian proper names found in the legend indicate that although in its present form it is of Semitic origin it must be based on older pre-Semitic materials. Moreover, the expression "his name" is written in Accadian (*mu-ni*) which shows that it has been quoted from an Accadian text.

² "The voice goes up and down."

³ "The voice creates,"

⁴ *Ati lutsbat.*

19. The first year as it passed
20. one hundred and twenty thousand warriors I caused to go forth, and among them
21. not one returned alive.
22. The second year as it passed I caused 90,000 soldiers to go forth and none returned alive.
23. The third year as it passed I caused 60,700 to go forth, and none returned.
24. They were carried away, they were smitten with sickness. I ate,
25. I lamented,¹ I rested.
26. Thus did I speak to my heart saying, "Verily it is I, and
27. (yet) what have I left to reign over?
28. I am a king who makes not his country whole,

COLUMN III

1. and a shepherd who makes not his people whole,
2. Since I have produced corpses and have left a desert."²
3. With terror of men,³ night, death (and) plague have I cursed it.
4. With fear, violence, destruction (and) famine
5. (I have effected) the overthrow of all that exist.
6. there descended.
7. (I) caused a deluge.
8. that deluge.
9. all
10. the foundations (of the earth were shaken?)
11. The gods
12. Thou didst command me, and
13. and *they are created* (?)
14. Thou protectest
15. A memorial of drinking and
16. in supplication to Ea
17. holy memorial sacrifices

¹ *Asus*.

² *Buti*.

³ *Salummat nisi*. This passage shows that *salummat* cannot signify "brilliance," as Jensen supposes.

18. holy laws
19. I called the sons of the augurs
20. seven against seven in breadth I arranged (them).
21. I placed the holy *reeds* (?)
22. I *implored* (?) the (great) gods,
23. ISTAR,, (ZAMAMA, ANUNIT),
24. NEBO, (and SAMAS the warrior)
25. the son (of the Moon-god, the of the gods my
couriers)

COLUMN IV

Many lines are lost.

1. With
2. the men
3. the city NAK¹
4. a city which
5. to
6. powerful king
7. the gods
8. my hand
9. Thou, O king, high priest,² shepherd, or any one else,
10. whom the god shall call (to) rule the kingdom,
11. this tablet I have made for thee, (this) stêlê I have in-
scribed for thee
12. in the city of CUTHA in the temple of SULIM ;³
13. in the ark⁴ of NERGAL I have left it for thee.
14. Hearken to the voice⁵ of this stêlê, and
15. remove it not, forget⁶ it not ;
16. fear not, tremble not !
17. May he establish thy seat !
18. Mayest thou achieve success⁷ in thy works !

¹ Perhaps *nak(ru)* "foreign."

² *Patê'si*.

³ The name of the great temple of Nergal in Cutha. For the reading see my *Lectures on the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians*.

⁴ *Papakh*, "the ark" in which the image of the god was carried, and which stood in the inner shrine or "holy of holies" (*parakku*).

⁵ Literally "mouth."

⁶ *Tensi* for *temsi*.

⁷ *Sîpar*.

19. Build up¹ thy fortresses !
20. Fill² thy canals with water !
21. May thy papyri,³ thy corn, thy silver,
22. thy goods, thy property,
23. (and) thy furniture, (all) of them
24. (be multiplied) ! strengthen the . . . for (thy) hands !
25. make perfect the stores of thine increase !
26. (As for the evil one) thou shalt cause him to go forth.
27. (As for the harmful one) thou shalt enchain him.

¹ *Urrim*, whence *arammu*, "a wall."

² *Nabli*; comp. *nubalu*, W. A. I., i. 15, vii. 57.

³ *Pi sannati*.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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