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The Antiquity of Sacred Writings in the Valley of the Euphrates.

By S. D. MILLER.

The existence of sacred writings in the country of the Euphrates, at a period certainly anterior to Abraham's departure from Ur of the Chaldees, is reasonably to be inferred from the evidences afforded by the cuneiform inscriptions. From the Hebrews with the Babylonians, at different periods, dating from the earliest epochs; and from the numerous analogies existing between the sacred traditions inherited alike by the two peoples, and recorded in the sacred writings which each had preserved independently of the other, it is obvious that the origin of these sacred books, as preserved independently by the two peoples, must be assigned to nearly the same antiquity. This is rendered all the more probable from the fact that Abraham, during his earlier sojourn in the country of Ur, on the lower Euphrates, must have been familiar with the Chaldean Sacred Oracles; and now that the use of papyrus by the Chaldeans from the earliest period has been fully shown, it is by no means impossible that Abraham carried copies of these sacred books with him, on his departure for the country of his future inheritance, and that of his descendants. It will be seen, at least, from the foregoing hints, that the question of the antiquity of sacred writings in the country of the Euphrates, has a direct bearing upon the theories recently put forth by critics, assigning an extremely modern date, comparatively speaking, for the origin of the Books of Moses; and it is proposed in the present article to place before the readers of this journal the leading facts, derived mainly from the inscriptions, tending to establish the high antiquity of the sacred writings, as known to have been preserved by the Babylonians.

In Berosus' account of the deluge, there are three distinct allusions to the existence of sacred books, which, as they are connected with later traditions to be noticed, are reproduced here. It is stated that Cronus appeared to Xisuthrus in a dream, warned him of the coming deluge, and "He bade him bury in Sippara, the City of the Sun, the extant writings, first and last." Agri, after Xisuthrus had been translated, his voice was heard by his companions, bidding them to "Return to Babylon, and recover the writings buried at Sippara, and make them known among men." Finally, it is stated that they went their way to Babylon, "and, having reached it

recovered the buried writings from Sippara, and built many cities and temples." Now, while modern critics have attached no weight whatever to this tradition of the sacred books as transmitted to us by Berosus, it seems to be well established from the inscriptions, that the ancient monarchs of Babylon entertained a firm belief in the existence of such writings, which had been preserved during the deluge, and transmitted to after ages. We refer here to the well-known inscription of Nabonidus, touching the sacred tablets supposed to have been deposited in the foundations of the temple *Ul-bar*, and giving an account of the excavations made at different periods to discover them. We cannot introduce the matter better than in the language of M. F. Lenormant, as follows:

"This history of the tables containing the principles of all knowledge, revealed by the Theophanies of Anu (Gr. *Oannes*), which had been buried by Xisuthrus at the time of the deluge, in order that they might be transmitted to the post-diluvian world, had been, as we have shown, the source of the legend quite similar, relating to the columns of Thoth or Seth in the land of Biriad, to which the Pseudo-Manetho alludes. Josephus says that these pillars existed even in his time; and here we believe to have again a Babylonian tradition attaching itself to a real fact, which is revealed to us by the fragment of the barrel (inscribed cylinder) of Nabunahid, discovered at Mughier, the ancient Ur, now preserved in the British Museum. We learn from this, in effect, that when Sagaraktiyas, a king of the first historical dynasty of the Chaldeans, who was certainly contemporaneous with the kings of the ancient empire in Egypt, reconstructed the pyramidal temple of the goddess Ammis, called *Ulbar*, situated in that part of Sippara known as Agani; he made certain mysterious tablets in imitation of those carried by Xisuthrus from Larsam (Modern Senkreh), his native city, to Sippara; and buried them under the corner stone (*temin*) of the temple *Ulbar*. These tables were probably thought to be copies of those that had been buried at the time of the deluge; and thus the king, himself really historical, thought to give to his reconstructed edifice a more august consecration, in realizing a fabulous tradition. In the course of centuries these tables buried by Sagaraktiyas had become themselves famous and legendary; they had come to be regarded, probably, as the originals of those of Larsam hidden for the first time by Xisuthrus. Thus, at an epoch anterior to the 13th century before our era, the king Kuri-galzu, who appertained to the fourth or fifth dynasty of Berosus made excavations in the mass of the or fifth dynasty of Berosus, made excavations in the mass of the pyramid in search of these tables, but without success. Similar labors were undertaken by the kings of later periods, always for the same purpose, yet with no result. It was only at the period shortly before the reign of the Babylonian power that Nabunahid, after protracted efforts, succeeded finally in discovering the tables buried by Sagaraktiyas."

We give below a translation of the inscription of Nabonidus, so far as relates to these tables, following the versions by Lenormant, Oppert, and Menant. It will be seen to be very fragmentary. Nabonidus proceeds thus:

"The tables of Larsam had been deposited under the cornerstone of the temple *Ulbar*, at Agani, in ancient times, by Sagaraktiyas, king of Babylon, and Naram-Sin, his son, my predecessors; they had not seen the light before the glorious day of Nabunahid, king of Babylon. Kuri-galzu, king of Babylon, who preceded me; made search for them, but he did not find the corner-stone of the temple *Ulbar*, and thus he made this inscription: 'I have searched for the corner-stone and I have not found it.' *Assur-akhi idin* (Asarkaddan), king of the country of Assyria, king of legions, made search for them" (the tables).

Three lines wanting, when the text begins as follows:

"Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, son of *Nabu-pal-assar*, my predecessor, with the aid of his army, searched for the corner-stone of the temple *Ulbar*, and did not find it. And I, Nabunahid, king of Babylon, restorer of *Bit-Saggadhu* and *Bit-Tida*, in my victorious years, adoring Ishtar of Agani, my mistress, I have caused a pit to be excavated. The gods Shamas and Bin directing me, I have searched for the corner-stone of the temple *Ulbar*, for my own happiness. With the constancy worthy of a king I have directed my army in the search for this corner-stone, where Nebuchadnezzar during three years (180 days?) had opened a trench for the excavations. They have explored to the right and to the left, before and behind; and I have searched, and I have not found it. Then they say: 'We have searched for this corner-stone, and we have not found it. The tempest of waters has inundated everything, and has ruined all.'"

There occurs now a long fracture in the text, in which, probably, the monarch gave the details of a renewed search, for when the text becomes again partly legible, we read:

"The temple of Sin, and this temple of the temple *Ulbar*, for the construction of this temple. I have found the corner-stone of the temple *Ulbar* and have read the name of Sagaraktiyas at the bottom."

There then follows the memorial inscription of Sagaraktiyas, copied by Nabonidus, after which he says: "I have replaced in the foundations the Barrel of the East, the Barrel of the West, and the foundation stone in front," etc. On account of the fragmentary condition of Nabonidus' inscription, some mistakes have occurred in its rendering heretofore. It is certain, for instance, that Naram-sin was not the son of Sagaraktiyas, but of Sargon, the ancient, king of Agane. On the other hand, it is certain that the name Sagaraktiyas occurs in connection with the memorial cylinder discovered and copied by Nabonidus. But Sagaraktiyas is placed several reigns after *Kuri-galzu*, even, by Mr. Smith; hence it is necessary to conclude that the tables of Larsam were deposited in the foundations of the temple *Ulbar* by Sargon, the father of Naram-sin.

It will have been noticed in the extract from Mr. Lenormant that he regards the tables of Larsam as pure inventions, on the part of Sagaraktiyas being led to this conclusion, perhaps, from the fact that Nabonidus does not state, so far as the fragments of his inscription enable us to judge, that he actually found these tables. He merely copies the private inscription of Sagaraktiyas. But Nabonidus does speak of the "Barrel of the East and the Barrel of the West." If the in-

scription was entire, it is probable we should find some express allusion to the tables of Larsam, if in fact, the two barrels are not to be identified with them. It seems moreover, that the tables of Larsam were deposited, not by Sagaraktiyas, but by Sargon, the ancient; and this may account for the fact that they are not mentioned in connection with Sagaraktiyas. There is, then, much uncertainty respecting these tables. But we cannot believe that a deception had been perpetrated, on the part of the ancient monarch. Certainly Kuri-galzu, Asarkaddon, Nebuchadnezzar, and Nabonidus, were sufficient judges whether genuine sacred tablets had been deposited in the foundations of the temple *Ulbar*, in Sippara, the "City of the Sacred Books." But in point of fact, the statement of Nabonidus is positive, that the "Tables of Larsam had been deposited under the corner-stone of the temple *Ulbar*, at Agani, in ancient times, by Sargon (or Sagaraktiyas), king of Babylon, and Naram-sin; his son," and this statement was made after his search for the corner-stone. Had there been any mistake or deception in the matter, he would have discovered it, and so stated. At this early epoch, then, it is safe to assume that sacred writings existed in the valley of the Euphrates and according to all appearances, they had been handed down from a much earlier period, if not even from the antediluvian era.

As regards the date of Sargon's reign, that is, the elder Sargon's, much difference of opinion exists among Assyriologists. The English are accustomed to place him in the 16th century B. C., while the French, including M. M. Lenormant, Menant, and others, with much more reason, as we believe, assign him to the period about 2000 years B. C. They assign Sagaraktiyas to about the same epoch. Thus the existence of sacred writings in Babylonia, 2000 years before our era, seems to be quite well established.

But we have an important confirmation of the position we have assumed, in the late discovery of the "Creation Tablets" and the "Izdhubar Series," or "Deluge Tablets," by the lamented Mr. George Smith. This author believes that the originals of the "Izdhubar Series" were written soon after the death of this hero, whom he identifies with Nimrod, the founder of the Babylonian kingdom. As this account of the deluge formed part of the sacred writings, we must assign the latter to a period much earlier, even, than that of 2000 B. C. At a later period, however, and in his "Chaldean Genesis" Mr. Smith submits a chronological scheme, in which he assigns the origin of the "Deluge Tablets" to the epoch 2000 B. C., as the lowest date, and the "Creation Tablets" to the era between 1850 and 2000 B. C. But these dates appear to have been adopted as the lowest possible, out of consideration for the ordinary Biblical chronology; it is obvious that, in the author's real opinion, these documents appertained to periods some centuries earlier. It should be stated in this connection that the French Assyriologists generally assign dates for the early events and personages some five or six centuries prior to those fixed by the majority of the English school.

It results, now, from these investigations, that as early as the time of Kuri-galzu, 1350 B. C. the Babylonian monarchs were found employing their armies searching for sacred writ-

ings, which were supposed to have been deposited in the foundations of a temple which had long before fallen to a mass of ruins; writings, in fact, whose originals were believed to have been inherited from the period before the deluge, and whose copies dated from the epoch not less than 2000 years B. C. Entirely independent of this testimony, we trace the existence of documents at a period still more ancient, containing an account of the deluge, whose analogy with the Mosaic record of the same events is so striking as to enforce the conclusion of the common origin of the two narratives. Then we have the history of the creation, and of the fall of man, exhibiting the same analogies in all the details, between the Mosaic and Babylonian documents, the one appertaining to the history of the creation, the other to that of the deluge, the analogies with the Mosaic record of the same events are so numerous and so exact, that it is impossible to trace the two accounts to different original sources. Hence, if we admit for one an antiquity of 2000 years before our era, we must assign the same antiquity to the other.

It is inconceivable, under such circumstances, that the Mosaic record actually originated only after the lapse of centuries from this date. One of two positions has to be assumed here: either one record was copied from the other, or both had been derived originally and separately from the same ultimate source. In our opinion, for which, if we had the space, very substantial reasons could be given, the Hebrew-speaking Semites had preserved one account, and the Assyro-Babylonians another, both having been derived from one and the same original source. However this may be, that Abraham, before his departure from Ur, on the lower Euphrates, was familiar with documents whose contents were subsequently known under the form they take in the book of Genesis, seems fully established by facts with which every Assyriologist is familiar. That papyrus were in use at this early period is sufficiently evident from the investigation of both Rev. A. H. Sayce and Dr. Tablot. That the Abrahamites, therefore, possessed copies of the sacred writings before their departure from Ur, is not at all improbable. The book of Genesis is made up of three chief narratives. First. The history of the creation and of the fall, accompanied with the antediluvian genealogy. Second. The account of the deluge and of the settlements of the posterity of Noah, the construction of the tower, etc. Third. The history of Abraham and his descendants, of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt, till the time of Moses. The subject matter included under the first and second heads must have been familiar to Abraham, if from no other than from the Babylonian sacred writings, whose existence in his time is now a matter of fact. The matter included under the third head, must have been familiar to Moses, if the family of Abraham had kept the least account of their varied fortunes, and if his immediate posterity had done the same; and it is impossible that they should not have done so. Thus, Moses had at his command, beyond any doubt, all the materials that we find to-day embodied in the book of Genesis, and this book, therefore, undoubtedly dates from the time of Moses.—*The Oriental Journal.*

Grief counts the minutes; happiness forgets them.—*Madame Wollay.*