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978-1-108-07901-3 - The Chaldean Account of Genesis: Containing the Description of the Creation, the Deluge, the Tower of Babel, the Desruction of Sodom, the Times of the Patriarchs, and Nimrod

George Smith

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The Chaldean Account of Genesis

The Assyriologist George Smith (1840–76) was trained originally as an engraver, but was enthralled by the discoveries of Layard and Rawlinson. He taught himself cuneiform script, and joined the British Museum as a ‘repairer’ or matcher of broken cuneiform tablets. Promotion followed, and after one of Smith’s most significant discoveries among the material sent to the Museum – a Babylonian story of a great flood – he was sent to the Middle East, where he found more inscriptions which contained other parts of the epic tale of Gilgamesh. In 1876, shortly before his early death, Smith published this work, which drew extraordinary parallels between much earlier cuneiform documents and the biblical book of Genesis. The book was both controversial and very successful. The second edition, reissued here, was published in 1880, with corrections and additional material provided by Archibald Sayce (1846–1933), which reflected recent advances in Middle Eastern studies.

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GEORGE SMITH

EDITED BY ARCHIBALD H. SAYCE



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S. Thompson.

IZDUBAR (NIMROD) IN CONFLICT WITH A LION.

FROM AN EARLY BABYLONIAN CYLINDER.

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CONTAINING

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TOWER OF BABEL, THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM,
THE TIMES OF THE PATRIARCHS,
AND NIMROD ;
BABYLONIAN FABLES, AND LEGENDS OF THE GODS ;
FROM THE CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTIONS.

BY GEORGE SMITH,

FORMERLY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES, BRITISH MUSEUM,
AUTHOR OF " HISTORY OF ASSURBANIPAL," " ASSYRIAN
DISCOVERIES," ETC. ETC.

A NEW EDITION, THOROUGHLY REVISED AND CORRECTED (WITH ADDITIONS),

BY A. H. SAYCE,

DEPUTY-PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

IT is now five years since the present volume was first laid before the public by Mr. George Smith, just before setting out on his last ill-fated expedition to the East. It naturally awakened extreme interest and curiosity. The earlier chapters of Genesis no longer stood alone. Parallel accounts had been discovered by the author among the clay records of ancient Babylonia, which far exceeded in antiquity the venerable histories of the Bible. All those who had a theory to support, or a tradition to overthrow, turned eagerly to the newly-discovered documents, which possessed an equal interest for the students of history, of religion, and of language.

The five years that have elapsed since the publication of "The Chaldean Account of Genesis" have been five years of active work and progress among Assyrian scholars. The impulse given to Assyrian research by Mr. Smith has survived his death; numberless new tablets and fragments of tablets have been brought to Europe from Assyria and Babylonia; fresh students of the inscriptions have risen up in this country

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and on the continent, more especially in Germany; and the scientific spirit which has been introduced into the study of the Assyrian language has immeasurably increased our knowledge of it. Thanks to the labours of men like Oppert, Lenormant and Guyard in France, or of Schrader, Delitzsch, Haupt and Hommel in Germany, texts which were obscure and doubtful at the time of Mr. Smith's death have now become almost as clear as a page of the more difficult portions of the Old Testament. The Assyrian student, moreover, has an advantage which the Hebrew student has not; he possesses dictionaries and vocabularies compiled by the Assyro-Babylonians themselves, and these frequently throw light on a word which otherwise would be a "hapax legomenon."

The more backward condition of our knowledge of Assyrian, however, was not the only difficulty against which Mr. Smith had to contend. He was pressed for time when writing the present volume, which had to be finished before his departure for the East. The class of texts, also, which he had brought to light was a new class hitherto unknown, or almost unknown, to the Assyrian decipherer. He had to break fresh ground in dealing with them. Their style differed considerably from that of the texts previously studied; they had a vocabulary of their own, allusions of their own, and even, it may be added, a grammar of their own. If the texts had been complete the difficulty perhaps would not have been so great; but it was enormously increased by

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their mutilated condition. The skill and success with which Mr. Smith struggled against all these difficulties show more plainly than ever what a loss Assyrian research has sustained in him.

Nevertheless, even the genius of Mr. Smith could not do more than give a general idea of the contents of the fragments, and not always even this. A comparison of the translations contained in the present edition with those contained in the preceding ones will show to what an extent the details of translation have had to be modified and changed, sometimes with important consequences. Thus the corrected translation of the fragments relating to the Tower of Babel will remove the doubts raised by Mr. Smith's translation as to his correctness in associating them with that event; thus, too, the corrected rendering of a passage in the Izdubar Epic will show that the practice of erecting a Bethel or sacred stone was familiar to the early Babylonians. In some instances Mr. Smith has misconceived the true character of a whole text. What he believed to be a record of the Fall, for instance, is really, as M. Oppert first pointed out, a hymn to the Creator.

On the other hand, the fresh materials that have been acquired by the British Museum during the last five years, or a closer examination of the treasures it already possessed, have enabled us to add to the number of cuneiform texts which illustrate the earlier portions of Genesis. Mr. Rassam, for example, has brought home a fragment of the Deluge

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tablet, which not only helps us to fill up some of the *lacunæ* in the text, but is also important in another way. It is written, not in Assyrian, but in Babylonian cuneiform characters, and comes, not from an Assyrian, but from a Babylonian library. But it agrees exactly with the corresponding parts of the Assyrian editions of the story, and thus furnishes us with a proof of the trustworthiness of the Assyrian copies of the old Babylonian texts. The text, again, which relates to the destruction of a country by a rain of fire, though long contained in the British Museum Collection, was first noticed by myself as being apparently the Babylonian version of the biblical account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Numerous alterations and insertions have had to be made in the text which accompanies the translations. The latter necessarily occupied the main part of Mr. Smith's attention; he had neither time nor inclination to enter very elaborately into the questions raised by them, or the illustrations they might receive from elsewhere. In fact, any adequate treatment of the great Izdubar Epic, for instance, demanded a special acquaintance with the method and results of Comparative Philology, as well as a more intimate knowledge of its history and character than was possible at the time when Mr. Smith wrote.

A large proportion of the cuneiform texts from which the translations contained in the present volume are made has not yet been published. I have, how-

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ever, gone carefully over them all with the exception of a small portion of the Izdubar Epic, and endeavoured to bring the translations up to the level of our present knowledge of the Assyrian language. I am indebted to the ready kindness and accurate eye of Mr. Pinches for copies of almost all the unpublished portions of the Izdubar legends. In these he has corrected several faulty readings, more especially that of the name of the pilot of Xisuthrus, which ought to be Nes-Hea, "the lion of Hea." Mr. Pinches assures me that the name of the deity composing the second part of the name is invariably written with the numeral 40, the symbol of the god Hea, except once when the scribe has miswritten 50, the symbol of Bel, and he has pointed out to me a passage in a bilingual tablet where the name is explained in Assyrian by Nes-Hea. Unfortunately, the texts given in pp. 103-124 cannot be found, and here therefore I have been obliged to leave Mr. Smith's translations unaltered.

The reader, however, must remember that no translations of these mutilated tablets can be more than approximately correct. Even if the meaning of all the words were well known, and they were divided from one another (which is not the case), the broken condition of so many of the inscriptions would make a good deal of the translation more or less conjectural. This must be doubly the case where the signification of the words is either unknown or only half known. I have always endeavoured to

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indicate a doubtful word or passage by a query; but there must be instances in which the meaning that I believe ought to be assigned to particular words will be corrected by the further progress of discovery. This is even more true of what may be termed the commentary accompanying the translations. Surprises are constantly in store for the Assyrian decipherer, and a tiny fragment may suddenly throw a new light on a question he had supposed to be settled. In fact, in Assyriology, as in all other branches of science, there is no finality; we cannot be more than approximately exact at any given time, and every month enables us to introduce fresh corrections and improvements into our work.

A fresh illustration of the fact has been afforded even while the present volume has been passing through the press. Mr. Pinches has come across two fragments (one marked S 669, the other unnumbered) which belong to two separate copies or editions of a very interesting work. This is nothing less than a list of the ancient epics and legends of Chaldea, along with the names of their reputed authors, many of whom, however, are probably as mythical as the famous Rishis of India. The list shows how numerous these early poems were, and how few of them, comparatively, we possess at present. Both fragments belong to the same part of the list, and we are therefore ignorant of many of the ancient compositions it must originally have contained. Some of the works mentioned receive their

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names from the heroes celebrated in them, others are named from their opening lines. A distinction is drawn between those that belonged to the Accadian period, and were written by Accadian poets in the Accadian language, and those that were of Semitic Babylonian origin. The interest of the list is enhanced by the great antiquity of the poems it records, none of them being later than about 2000 B.C. Here is a translation of the text as restored from a comparison of the two fragments according to the copies I have made of them:—

OBVERSE.

1. *Ca*
2. This is the work (*literally* from the mouth) of .

3. “*a khus ba a ri*
4. the god *tsu bu nu*” [Accadian.]
5. This is the work of Nupatuv

6. “The mighty lady, the winged one, Nigirra,”
or “Bel”
7. “He restored Til-enni,” or “Life.”
8. “May Merodach the great lord firmly defend.”
[Semitic.]
9. This is the work of Basa-Gula, the scribe . . .

10. “The king of the sphere in their front,” or
“the lord” [Acc.]
11. This is the work of En-me-duga

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12. "head, thy lustre" [Acc.]

13. This is the work of Elum

14. *ci bat*

REVERSE.

1.

2. (This is the work of) ragas, the scribe, the man (of a non-existent tablet).

3. "the gods" [Acc.]. This is the work of

4. "the bull of Bit-Esir (the firmament)," or "The great fortress of the royal crown" [Acc.]

5. This is the work of Cus-dib the son of

6. *nun-na* [Acc.]. This is the work of Elum-ban-cudur, the son of Khumetis, the scribe, the man of (a non-existent) tablet.7. "the *paggalti* which over heaven are placed" [Sem.].

8. (This) is the work of Gimil-Gula, the son of Il-khigal the scribe, the man of a non-existent tablet.

9. "The day of calling, the long day at the dawning of light" (?) [Acc.]. This is the work of Ekur (Esiru), the son of Nunna-tur.

10. The hero Izdubar. This is the work of Sin-lici-unnini the scribe

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11. The hero Etana. This is the work of Nis-Sin the scribe

12. The hero the Fox. This is the work of Kak-Merodach the son of Eri-Turnunna, the man of a non-existent tablet.

13. (The hero) 'Sidu. This is the work of 'Sidu-labiri the prince, the man of a non-existent tablet.

14: *a tu gab* [Acc.]. This is the work of Lig-Dimir the scribe, the man (of a non-existent tablet).

What is meant by the phrase "the man of a non-existent tablet," I do not know. Possibly it signifies that the autograph of the author no longer existed at the time the list was drawn up. "The Bull of the firmament" was a legend which was probably connected with the second month of the year, originally, it would seem, the first, which like the zodiacal sign after which it was named, was called the month of "the directing bull."

Future excavations will doubtless bring to light some of the poems mentioned in the list and not previously known. I have myself lately come across two fragments (S 802 and S 316) which belong to legends hitherto unknown, but they are too short to be worth translating. What curious revelations, however, we may yet expect from the cuneiform records may be judged from a small and well-

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preserved tablet recently brought to England, which contains a catalogue of the gardens belonging to Merodach-Baladan, the contemporary of Hezekiah, and grouped according to the districts in which they were situated. Merodach-Baladan must have been fond of horticulture, since the catalogue contains the names of no less than sixty-seven seed-gardens, besides six other pleasure-grounds. Many of them were named from the localities in whose neighbourhood they were, but others bore such significant titles as “the forest of reeds,” “the small enclosure,” or “the garden of the waters of the city.” As the tablet was copied by a scribe named Merodach-sum-iddin, probably in the time of Nebuchadnezzar or his successors, it is evident that some of the contents of the library of Babylon escaped the destruction brought upon that city by Sennacherib in B.C. 692.

I may add that since the greater part of this edition has been in type, I have found myself able to explain the name of the hero which in default of the true transcription has been provisionally read Izdubar. The name is composed of three ideographs, the first of which is the determinative prefix of wood, while the two latter are rendered *saptu saplitu*, “the lower lip,” in Semitic Assyrian. Now M. Lenormant has shown that Izdubar was originally the Accadian Fire-god, and Mr. Boscawen has pointed out that the fire-stick was once used in Babylonia; it is therefore evident that the three ideographs composing the name represent the lower

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piece of wood, with a lip or groove in it, which formed the most important part of the primitive fire-machine. I believe the Accadian pronunciation of the name will turn out to be Kibirra.

A. H. SAYCE.

May 21st, 1880.



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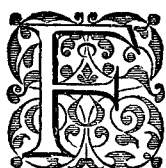
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