

# HISTORY OF BABYLONIA.



## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

BABYLONIA was bounded on the north by Assyria, on the east by Elam, or Susiana, on the west by the Desert of Arabia, and on the south by Arabia and the Persian Gulf. The country is watered by the lower courses of the Euphrates and Tigris, and in fact it may be considered as entirely the gift of those streams. Babylonia is in general a long level tract of alluvial soil, which has been deposited through several thousand years at the mouths of these rivers. Through the accumulation of new ground at the points where the Tigris and Euphrates discharge themselves into the Persian Gulf, the Babylonian territory has steadily increased from age to age. In early Chaldean times the sea reached to Abu-Shahrein, in the time of Sennacherib it had receded to Bab-

Salimiti; in the days of Nebuchadnezzar the port was moved out to Teredon, and since the fall of Babylon many miles have been added to the land.

The inhabitants of Babylonia have always mainly consisted of two classes, the agricultural population and dwellers in towns on one side, and the wandering, pastoral, tent-dwelling tribes on the other. The greatest feature of the country was its agriculture, which was mainly carried on through artificial irrigation, the whole country being intersected with canals, some of them navigable and of great size, their banks in some places being from twenty to thirty feet high. The long deserted lines of mounds, which even now exist in hundreds, marking the lines of these artificial rivers, form far more remarkable objects than the ruined cities and palaces. Once these channels teemed with life and industry, and were lined with cities containing thousands of people; now they are an arid desert waste, supporting only a few wandering tribes of Arabs. Babylonia is without doubt the oldest civilized country in Asia, and even outside that continent only Egypt can rival it in this respect; but the history of Babylonia has an interest beyond that of Egypt, on account of its more intimate connection with the origin of our own civilization: Babylonia

was the centre from which civilization spread into Assyria, from thence to Asia Minor and Phœnicia, from these to Greece and Rome, and from Rome to modern Europe.

Our astronomical system came originally from the plains of Chaldea. The Babylonians divided the face of the heavens into constellations of stars, and named these after their supposed influence, or from their resemblance to various fantastic forms.

Mathematics, measures of time and capacity, weights and scales, laws and government, and everything known in ancient times, received study and attention, while the arts of building, sculpture, painting, gem-engraving, metal-work, weaving, and many others made proportionate progress.

In spite of the skill and knowledge of the Babylonians, and their wonderful progress in arts and sciences, they had a religion of the lowest and most degrading kind. True insight into natural phenomena was prevented, and progress beyond the surface of things stopped by a religion which had a multitude of gods, who were supposed to bring about in an irregular and capricious manner all the changes in nature and all the misfortunes which happened to the people; thus foresight and medicine were neglected,

and unavailing prayers and useless sacrifices offered to propitiate the deities who were imagined to hold the destiny of the human race in their hands.

In the hands of some of the nobler poets of the Babylonians their mythology received a polish and finish, and was woven together into such graceful mythical forms, that their works may compare with those of Greece and Rome ; but among the bulk of the people a low and sensual view was taken of all these matters, and their worship was nothing better than an adoration of stocks and stones.

The Babylonians were essentially a peaceful race. War was seldom indulged in by them, except it was forced upon them, either by their political position or through the action of states outside their own borders. Only once in their history are they known to have made a great empire, and that was in the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

The wonderful system of writing, called, from the shape of the characters, cuneiform, or wedge-shaped, was invented by the original Turanian inhabitants of Babylonia.

[The characters were originally hieroglyphics, representing objects or combinations of objects, or symbolizing ideas. The pronunciation attached to the

characters was accordingly the name of the object or idea which they signified in the ancient Babylonian language. In course of time the characters came to be used, not only to represent objects and ideas, but also to denote mere sounds. Thus the character which signified "a memorial," *mu* in the ancient language, came also to express simply the pronunciation of the first personal pronoun *mu*. When the characters were subsequently borrowed by Semitic tribes akin to the Hebrews and Arabs, and the ancestors of the later Babylonians and Assyrians, the sounds attached to the characters, which had been significant in the older language, became so many mere phonetic values; *mi*, for instance, signified "black" in the older, so-called Accadian, language, but it was simply a meaningless phonetic value in the later Assyrian.]

The chief cities of Babylonia were the following:—

	Now represented by
Ur or Uru, literally "the City"    ...	Mugheir.
Erech or Uruk    ...    ...	Warka.
Nipur, the city of Bel    ...    ...	Niffer.
Larsa, perhaps the Ellasar of Genesis	
xiv.    ...    ...    ...	Senkereh.

	Now represented by
Babylon or Babel, originally called	
Ca-dimirra, "Gate of God" ...	Hillah.
Agané, near Sippara ... ..	Part of Sura.
Tiggaba or Kute (Cuthah) ... ..	Tel Ibrahim.
Kisu or Kis ... ..	Hymar.
Sippara or Sepharvaim, the city of	
the sun-god ... ..	Sura.
Zirgulla ... ..	Zerghul.
Dur or Diru, literally "The Fortress"	Déyr.
Eridhu, in the south-east of Baby-	
lonia ... ..	Site unknown.
Duran or Duban ... ..	Site unknown.
Karrak or Nisin ... ..	Site unknown.
Amarda or Marad ... ..	Site unknown.
Abnunna or Mullias or Umliyas ...	Site unknown.

Accadian literature was very extensive, and the libraries with which the country was stocked were full of treatises on all the branches of knowledge pursued by the ancient Chaldeans. One of the most famous of these libraries was that at Agané, established by Sargon. It contained the great Babylonian work on astronomy and astrology in seventy books, which was called the "Illumination of Bel," and was afterwards translated into Greek by the historian Berosus.

Part of the catalogue of the library has come down to us, having been preserved in a copy made for the library of Assur-bani-pal, at Nineveh, and it includes treatises on the conjunction of the sun and the moon, on the movements of Mars and Venus, and on comets, which are termed "stars with a tail behind and a corona in front," as well as a direction to the student, who is told to write down the number of the tablet or book he wants to consult, and the librarian will thereupon hand it to him. It must be remembered that most of the literature of the Babylonians was stamped upon the clay so abundant in the country, the clay being afterwards hardened in the fire, a comparatively small portion of it being written upon papyrus, and hence a clay tablet became synonymous with a book. Another famous library was at Senkereh, or Larša, which was rich in mathematical works. Some of these, one a table of squares and another of cubes, are now in the British Museum. Under Nebuchadnezzar Babylon enjoyed two libraries, and there seems to have been a very old one at Ur. The legends relating to the Deluge were brought to Nineveh from the library of Erech, and one of the legends of the Creation from the library of Cuthah. Attached to the library was an observatory, and the

astronomer-royal, as we may term him, had to send fortnightly reports of his observations to the king. Some of these we possess, and translations of them will be found in the "Records of the Past," Vol. I., 155-159.

A very curious portion of the Accadian literature is a collection of charms and formulæ of exorcism, which seems to belong to the very earliest period of Babylonian history. There are magic formulæ of all kinds, some to ward off sorcery, some to bewitch other persons. Closely connected with these are various treatises on divination and lists of omens by which it was believed the future might be known. Thus there are tables of omens from dreams, from births, from the inspection of the hand or the entrails of animals, and from the objects a traveller meets with on the road. The following translation will give some idea of these curious tables:—

- "(If a blue dog enters a palace, that palace) will be burned.  
(If) a yellow dog enters a palace, exit from that palace will be baneful.  
(If) a spotted dog enters a palace, that palace will give its peace to the enemy.  
(If) a dog goes to a palace and kills some one, that palace is deprived of peace.



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- (If) a dog goes to a palace and lies down on a bed,  
 that palace none with his hand will take.  
 (If) a dog goes to a palace and lies down on the  
 throne, that palace will be burned."

Some of the omens are hardly likely to happen, however desirable their consequences may be. Thus we are told that "when a sheep bears a lion, the arms of the king will be powerful, and the king will have no rival." Others of them are obvious enough in their connection; "to dream of bright fire," for instance, "forebodes a fire in the city," and "the sight of a decaying house" was a sign of misfortune to its occupant. Here is a specimen of the exorcisms adopted to drive away evil spirits and the diseases they were imagined to occasion:—

"The noxious god, the noxious spirit of the neck, the spirit of the desert, the spirit of the mountains, the spirit of the sea, the spirit of the morass, the noxious cherub of the city, this noxious wind which seizes the body (and) the health of the body: O, spirit of heaven, remember! O, spirit of earth, remember!

"The burning spirit of the neck which seizes the man, the burning spirit which seizes the man, the spirit which works evil, the creation of the evil spirit:

O, spirit of heaven, remember ! O, spirit of earth,  
 remember !

“Wasting, want of health, the evil spirit of the  
 ulcer, spreading quinsey of the gullet, the violent  
 ulcer, the noxious ulcer : O, spirit of heaven, remem-  
 ber ! O, spirit of earth, remember !

“Sickness of the entrails, sickness of the heart, the  
 palpitation of a sick heart, sickness of bile, sickness of  
 the head, noxious colic, the *agitation* of terror, flatu-  
 lency of the entrails, noxious illness, lingering sickness,  
 nightmare : O, spirit of heaven, remember ! O,  
 spirit of earth, remember !”

The most dreaded of the powers of evil were the  
 seven “baleful” spirits or winds, originally the storm-  
 clouds, of whom it was said by an ancient poet of  
 Eridhu : “Those seven in the mountain of the  
 sunset were begotten : those seven in the mountain of  
 the sunrise did grow up. In the deep places of the  
 earth have they their dwelling : in the high places of  
 the earth have they their name.” One of the formulæ  
 of exorcism contains the following hymn in reference  
 to them :—

“Seven (are) they, seven (are) they.  
 In the abyss of the deep seven (are) they.  
 In the brightness of heaven seven (are) they.