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The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia

Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876–1941), grandson of the mathematician Augustus De Morgan, studied oriental languages at Cambridge and in 1899 began his career in the British Museum's department of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities. He participated in excavations at Nineveh and Carchemish with colleagues including Leonard William King and David George Hogarth (whose works are also reissued in this series). Thompson's later publications included a verse translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and studies of ancient science. Published in 1903–4, this two-volume work made a substantial contribution to modern knowledge of ancient Babylonian demonology and magical practices. Volume 2 focuses on purification rituals, protection against disease, and descriptions of supernatural beings, but also contains additional protective charms against evil spirits. The work includes transliterations and explanatory notes, and was designed to accompany earlier British Museum publications of cuneiform texts from the seventh-century BCE Library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh.

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The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia

*Being Babylonian and Assyrian Incantations against
the Demons, Ghouls, Vampires, Hobgoblins, Ghosts,
and Kindred Evil Spirits, which Attack Mankind*

R. CAMPBELL THOMPSON



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Volume 2: Fever Sickness and Headache, Etc.
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Bronze animal-headed figure of one of the Babylonian Powers of Evil. The inscription upon it reads : (1) *Mu-kil pi* (?) (2) *-tik limuttim(tim)* (3) *ur-ru-ḫu* (4) *la-pit pagrâni*? (5) *mu-šar-bu* (6) *la-si-mu* (7) *la mu-ki-ia* (8) *ša aḫi*? (9) *šepâ* || *limuttim(tim)* (10) *iḫrus(us)*. “He that raiseth an evil . . . , rushing headlong, upheaving the dead, exalting, galloping, never stopping, whose brothers stretch forth (?) feet for evil.” (No. 93,078.)

(*Frontispiece.*)

THE
DEVILS AND EVIL SPIRITS
OF
BABYLONIA,

BEING BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN INCANTATIONS AGAINST THE
DEMONS, GHOULS, VAMPIRES, HOBGOBLINS, GHOSTS, AND
KINDRED EVIL SPIRITS, WHICH ATTACK MANKIND.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL CUNEIFORM TEXTS IN THE
BRITISH MUSEUM, WITH transliterations,
VOCABULARY, NOTES, ETC.

BY
R. CAMPBELL THOMPSON, M.A.
ASSISTANT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EGYPTIAN AND ASSYRIAN ANTIQUITIES, BRITISH MUSEUM.

WITH TWO PLATES.

VOL. II.

“FEVER SICKNESS” AND “HEADACHE,” ETC.

London:
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*TO MY FATHER,
REGINALD E. THOMPSON, M.D.*

Preface.

THE Series of Cuneiform Texts which are transliterated and translated in this, the second volume of my work on the Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia, are of a magical character, except for the interesting descriptions which are given of supernatural beings which form the concluding portion of the book. In contents, construction, and phraseology they closely resemble the documents relating to Evil Spirits, which will be found in the preceding volume.

A careful examination of the documents makes it almost certain that they were originally written in the ancient non-Semitic or Sumerian language of Mesopotamia, and we shall probably be not far wrong if we assign to them an antiquity of not less than six thousand years. It will, of course, be understood that the versions which are rendered into English in the following pages do not belong to this early date, but it is more than probable that they represent substantially an extremely ancient recension. Since they were drawn up for the Royal Library at Nineveh by the command of Ashurbanipal about the first half of the seventh century before Christ, we are fully justified in assuming that due care was shown by the court scribes in the choice of their materials.

The various groups of texts translated herein may be briefly described as follows :—

(1) The AŠAKKI MARŠŪTI, i.e., a Series of tablets which were composed with the view of curing the “Fever-sickness.” The number of tablets in the Series was not less than twelve, and the material consisted of exorcisms and spells, which were directed against the disease *Ašakku*. I have here translated this word by “fever,” because the symptoms exhibited by a man suffering from the *Ašakku*-disease closely resemble those of one smitten by intermittent fever, or by malaria. It must, however, be remembered that the translation of *Ašakku* by “fever” is tentative.

(2) The ṬI’I, i.e., a Series of tablets which were composed with the view of curing headache; the number of tablets in the Series consisted of nine, and their contents are charms and incantations which were used to drive away pains of all kinds in the head. In the present state of our knowledge it is impossible to say whether the early Sumerians distinguished between the various forms of headache which are accompanied by nausea, vomiting, etc.

(3) A series of miscellaneous texts containing charms, spells, and incantations, similar in character to that of the texts described in paragraphs (1) and (2). It is perfectly clear that they were written for the purpose of driving diseases of various kinds out of the body, but it is unfortunately impossible in all cases in the present state of our knowledge to say what

those infirmities were. We are, however, certain from the contents of the Tablet which I have called "U," that this document was composed with the express purpose of affording relief to those unfortunate wights who had been so unlucky as to have come under the influence of the Evil Eye.

(4) The next group of tablets is called LUḪ-KA, a title for which the meaning "Cleansing of the Mouth" may be suggested tentatively. Whether this be its exact rendering or not matters comparatively little, but we are certain that the texts were written for the purpose of restoring to ceremonial purity a man who had wittingly or unwittingly become contaminated or impure through touching or even beholding some unclean thing. The compositions of this group were, in short, intended to destroy one of the many forms of *tapu* to which, according to ancient Sumerian tradition, mankind was peculiarly liable.

(5) A group of tablets which contain descriptions of a number of supernatural beings, which corresponded roughly to the modern Arabic *Jinn* and *Jann*. The identification of the greater number of these is difficult; among those worthy of special note is the goddess NIN-TU, who is said to wear an elaborate tiara and veil, and to be girt about the loins with a zone or garment, her breast being uncovered. The upper part of her body is that of a naked woman, and the lower part is said to be scaly like the skin of a snake. It is important

from many points of view to observe that she is represented suckling her babe at the left breast. In the course of the excavations which have been made in Assyria during the last fifty years, numbers of clay figures possessing the characteristics described above have been found, and we are probably right in considering that they are intended to be votive figures of the goddess NIN-TU, which have been offered to her by devout but barren women who desired offspring. (For specimens of these figures see the Babylonian and Assyrian Room in the British Museum, Nos. 91,853–91,854.) There is little doubt that NIN-TU occupied among the peoples of Mesopotamia the position which Hathor held among the Egyptians and the Virgin Mary among Oriental Christian peoples. She was, in fact, a form of the World-Mother, or Chief Mother-Goddess, who plays such an important part in many mythologies.

(6) A text which supplies us with a unique version of the Legend of the Worm, i.e., with a copy of a very ancient prescription for curing the toothache. One of the most interesting characteristics of the legend is the manner in which the genesis of the Worm is traced by a series of steps from Anu, the Sky-god, and we see how even an evil thing may be derived from a divine source. Similarly, we may note the fact that the magician would sometimes assert that the evil which he was about to combat was so powerful that it had at some remote period vanquished even

the gods themselves. Thus, in Col. III of K. 191 we are told that the *šam libbi*, i.e., “Heart-plant,” on one occasion overcame the heart of Shamash, the Sun-god, and of Sin, the Moon-god, and that it also had power over the hearts of men and animals; and it is perfectly clear that the “Heart-plant” must have possessed some intoxicating and narcotic effect. We may note in passing that this text states that the plant grew in Matan, which is usually identified with the Sinaitic Peninsula, and I venture to suggest the identification of the *šam libbi* with the *Hyoscyamus muticus*, which I have seen growing in the Peninsula, and the natives told me that this plant possessed highly intoxicating properties, in fact they call it *saykarân*, i.e., that which intoxicates.¹

One of the most important results obtained from the study of the above-mentioned texts is the discovery of the existence of the *tapu* among the Sumerians and their successors, the Babylonians and Assyrians. It seems that it was almost impossible for man to avoid falling under some *tapu* or ban, and it is clear that the Semitic inhabitants of Western Asia must have derived their knowledge of this remarkable superstition from the earlier non-Semitic inhabitants of the country. With the existence of the *tapu* among the Sumerians I have been acquainted for some time

¹ For the text and a German rendering see Dr. Kuchler's *Beiträge*, Leipzig, 1904, p. 9 ff.

past, but to M. Fossey belongs the credit of being the first to publish an account of it, and to give the texts on which his deductions were based. For his views on the subject the reader is referred to his careful work *La Magie Assyrienne*, which appeared in 1902. Finally, mention must be made of another important discovery of the existence among the Sumerians of ceremonies which prove that this people had developed the idea of the "Atonement" several hundreds of years before the Hebrews. The verb used is *kuppuru*, which, as Dr. Zimmern has pointed out, is identical with the Hebrew word כִּפֶּר.

The ideas and beliefs which actually underlie the Levitical ceremonies of the "Atonement" are still but imperfectly understood, but I believe that the study of the texts in which the "Atonement" of the Sumerians is mentioned and described will do much to indicate the method to be followed in dealing with this important subject.

In conclusion, my thanks are due to Dr. E. A. Wallis Budge and Mr. L. W. King for much help in writing this book.

R. CAMPBELL THOMPSON.

LONDON, January 1st, 1904.

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