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THE REV. DR. H. CHADWICK
CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD
THE REV. DR. H. F. D. SPARKS
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ARTICLES

A NEW LOOK AT THE BABYLONIAN BACKGROUND OF GENESIS¹

MY subject arose in the first place from study of the cuneiform tablets from Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh, which had been dug up for the British Museum in the 1850's. The most important discoveries were published in the 1870's by George Smith: first, in 1872, a Babylonian version of the flood story was made known,² and three years later a Babylonian account of creation was announced,³ translations of the pieces being given in Smith's book, *The Chaldean Account of Creation*, which appeared in the following year, 1876.

The attention of Old Testament scholars was now assured.⁴ Even the most sceptical had to yield when confronted with the passage in the Babylonian text which described how three birds were sent out of the ark as the waters were subsiding. With the creation account the similarities were not so great. Although the Babylonian cosmology began with a primaeval Tiāmat, which is the etymological equivalent of *t'hôm*, 'the deep', in Gen. i, the major item of the Babylonian text, the battle between Marduk and Tiāmat, does not appear in the Hebrew accounts of creation. The German scholar Gunkel supplied the missing link in his book *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895). He drew attention to a series of passages in the poetic books of the Old Testament in which a battle between Yahweh and the sea, or sea monsters, is alluded to. On this basis it could be affirmed that a conflict had existed in Hebrew traditions of creation, but had been washed out of the monotheistic formulation of Genesis i. Gunkel was not in fact the first to propound this idea. Our own Cheyne, in the year in which this book appeared, took the author to task in the *Critical Review* for not acknowledging that as far back as 1877 he himself had been advancing such views.⁵

¹ A paper read to the Society for Old Testament Study on 2 January 1964 at King's College Hostel, London.

² In a paper read to the Society of Biblical Archaeology on 3 December 1872, which was printed in the *Transactions* of the Society the following year.

³ In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, 4 March 1875.

⁴ Criticisms of George Smith's work, however, were more severe than is often realized today. A writer in the *Athenaeum* spoke of 'the melancholy death of Mr. Smith just as all European scholars were most anxious that his earlier and, in some cases, hasty conclusions should derive the advantage of his calmer and better informed judgement' (July to December, 1877, p. 864).

⁵ *Critical Review*, v (1895), pp. 256-66.

Cheyne had in fact mentioned the battle with Tīāmat as a possible parallel to the poetic allusions, whereas Gunkel was asserting that all the references to Rahab, Leviathan, etc., were but borrowed versions of Marduk's fight. However, another scholar had much greater claim to have been plagiarized. George A. Barton, a young American, had read a paper in 1890 in which he cited the main passages about Rahab, Leviathan, etc., and the dragon of the Book of Revelation, and drew the conclusion that these were direct reflections of the Babylonian myth. This paper was published in 1893¹ and was known to Gunkel in the preparation of his book, since he quoted it on various minor points.

Whoever first propounded the idea (Barton seems to have the better claim), he provided the justification for assuming a direct connexion of some kind between the Babylonian and Hebrew accounts of creation. By the turn of the century the idea of dependence on a Babylonian original in the two cases of creation and flood was an accepted opinion in critical circles, so much so that strong assertions usually covered up the differences in the case of the former. Few thought it necessary even to admit of any problem, as did S. R. Driver in his commentary on Genesis, where he says about the creation narratives:

In estimating these similarities, it must further be remembered that they do not stand alone: in the narrative of the Deluge we find traits borrowed unmistakably from a Babylonian source; so that the antecedent difficulty which might otherwise have been felt in supposing elements in the Creation-narrative to be traceable ultimately to the same quarter is considerably lessened. *The Book of Genesis*⁶ (1907), p. 30.

This amounts to saying that even though the case for the creation narrative is dubious, the better case of the flood can be used to prove it, a very debatable procedure. It should be added that another factor involved in the acceptance of this opinion by the turn of the century was the date assigned to the Babylonian texts. While the copies then available were not earlier than 750 B.C., the texts were believed to go back to at least 2000 B.C., well before the earliest possible date for Genesis.

The last sixty years have witnessed vast increases in knowledge of the various factors involved in this problem. It is no longer possible to talk glibly about Babylonian civilization. We now know that it was composed of three main strands. First, it inherited much from the Sumerians, who built up the first great civilization in Southern Mesopotamia. A second element was derived from a group of Semites who probably came down the Euphrates valley in the middle of the third millennium B.C. Thirdly, it owed something to the Amorites, who likewise came down the

Euphrates valley, but at the end of the third millennium, and took over the country. The Sumerians were the most original and dynamic in cultural matters, and the other two groups owed something to them even before they had settled down. Consequently it is often difficult to know if a particular item of Babylonian civilization originated with one of these three groups or was a new creation. More is known of the Amorites than of the earlier Semitic migrants, and their influence can be found in works of Babylonian literature. In my opinion the *lex talionis* in the Code of Hammurabi depends on an Amorite legal tradition, since it was an innovation in Mesopotamian law. Also the location of the Sumero-Babylonian pantheon on Mount Hermon in the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* is certainly Amorite in conception.¹ Thus Babylonian civilization was a highly composite thing, and it is no longer scientifically sound to assume that all ideas originated in Mesopotamia and moved westwards. This is pan-babylonism. Parallels to Genesis can indeed be sought and found there, but they can also be sought and found among the Canaanites, the ancient Egyptians, the Hurrians, the Hittites, and the early Greeks. When the parallels have been found, the question of dependence, if any, has to be approached with an open mind.

Another qualification which is often overlooked in comparative studies of this kind is the inner diversity of so large and so long-lasting a civilization as the Babylonian. Our remoteness often causes the inquirer to attach an exaggerated importance to whatever fragment from this vast complex he happens to be working on. The doctrine of one text may be carelessly styled 'the Babylonian view', as though it were proved to have been held by all Babylonians of all periods and areas. More systematic study reveals what could very well have been conjectured, that a great variety of ideas circulated in ancient Mesopotamia. Sumerian religion crystallized in city states, each with its particular gods and cults. Mutual tolerance was manifested in a generally accepted hierarchical order of the chief gods from the different cities. While Hammurabi welded the same cities into a single Babylonian state, religion continued its city-bound organization, though quite substantial changes gradually took place in the official hierarchy. And in all matters the 1,100 years between Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar II witnessed tremendous development. Yet, to the end, despite the political

¹ See W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960), pp. 12-13. The American scholar A. T. Clay between 1908 and his death in 1925 countered the opinion that Hebrew religion derived much from Babylon by asserting the influence of the Amorites. In detail much that he wrote has proved wrong, and was indeed never generally accepted, but his main thesis has been vindicated in some measure, as stated by the present holder of his Yale chair, Albrecht Goetze, in *The Yale University Library Gazette*, xxxvi (1962), pp. 133-7.

¹ *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, xv, pp. 1 ff.

unity based on the city of Babylon, matters of thought still reflected local attachments. In the first millennium B.C. creativity in myth was no longer expressed in literary compositions of epic style. Instead, expository texts and scholarly commentaries of a highly esoteric character were compiled. The distinction between those expounding the myths of Nippur and those the myths of Babylon, for example, is easily discerned.

One matter can be disposed of very quickly. The recovery of the Ugaritic texts has shown that the allusions to Yahweh's battle with Leviathan and the *tannin*, but not Rahab, are derived from Canaanite Baal myths, and these show no signs of dependence on Mesopotamian sources.¹ Accordingly, one of the main supports for assuming the dependence of Genesis on Babylonian myths has gone, and the whole question needs reconsideration. Yet not all Old Testament scholars have really faced the facts. The following random quotations of recent opinion illustrate the position. Kaufmann in his *Religion of Israel* does indeed assert the Canaanite rather than Babylonian origin of the poetic allusions to battles with monsters.² Similarly Hans-Joachim Kraus in his commentary on the Psalms refers to the Babylonian epic only as a parallel, and insists on the prior relevance of the Ugaritic material.³ Contrast this with Eissfeldt's article on Genesis in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, which repeats essentially what Gunkel said, only modernizing the terminology: instead of Babylonian origin he speaks of 'Sumerian-Akkadian prototypes'.⁴ Von Rad, in his commentary on Genesis, asserts the 'unbestreitbare Zusammenhang' of the Babylonian *Tiāmat* and *t'hôm* in Gen. i, meaning a mythological and not only a philological connexion.⁵ Similarly Orlinsky, in a recently published apologia for the Jewish Publication Society's new translation of the Pentateuch, asserts: 'Scholars have long recognized that the biblical version of creation has great affinity with what we know of the Mesopotamian versions, that the former—whether directly or indirectly—derives ultimately and in significant measure from the latter.'⁶

On the Sumero-Babylonian side matters are hardly more satisfactory. New editions of *Enūma Eliš*, or the *Babylonian Epic of Creation* as it is

¹ The two main passages, Andrée Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques* (1963), no. 3. iii. 33-44 and no. 5. i. 1-3, are conveniently quoted with translation by Otto Kaiser, *Die mythische Bedeutung des Meeres* (Z.A.T.W., Beiheft 78), pp. 74-75. The other passages can be found in the glossaries of C. H. Gordon and G. R. Driver, and in the dictionary of Aistleitner, under *ltn* and *tnn*.

² Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (English digest by M. Greenberg, 1961), p. 62.

³ *Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament*, xv/1 (1960), p. 518.

⁴ Ed. G. A. Buttrick (1962), ii, p. 375.

⁵ *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, Teilband 2, p. 38.

⁶ *J.B.L.*, lxxxii (1963), p. 256.

commonly called, have been made by merely adding new material to the old editions, with all their inevitable and, in their cases, excusable faults. L. W. King's excellent edition of 1902¹ was the last truly critical edition based on first-hand study of all the textual evidence. In addition to this major and several minor texts, there is a mass of allusions and other secondary material comparable with the allusions in Hebrew poetry, which no one has hitherto collected, much less studied. The greatest failure, however, has been in the general interpretation of the major epic. Views put out as plausible conjectures at the end of the last century have, by frequent repetition, become endowed with canonical status, and are now asserted in such terms as 'it is generally admitted'² (which means that no one has ever proved) and 'there is no convincing reason against'³ (which patently confesses the lack of conclusive reasons for). Under these circumstances I have tried to get to the bottom of the various questions and to assemble neglected material. Some of my results, for what they are worth, must be used in the following notes.⁴

The first major conclusion is that the *Epic of Creation* is not a norm of Babylonian or Sumerian cosmology. It is a sectarian and aberrant combination of mythological threads woven into an unparalleled compositum. In my opinion it is not earlier than 1100 B.C. It happens to be the best preserved Babylonian document of its genre simply because it was at its height of popularity when the libraries were formed from which our knowledge of Babylonian mythology is mostly derived. The various traditions it draws upon are often perverted to such an extent that conclusions based on this text alone are suspect. It can only be used safely in the whole context of ancient Mesopotamian mythology. With this introduction let us turn to the matter in hand.

The flood remains the clearest case of dependence of Genesis on Mesopotamian legend. While flood stories as such do not have to be connected, the episode of the birds in Genesis viii. 6-12 is so close to the parallel passage in the XIth tablet of the Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic*⁵ that no doubt exists. The only other Babylonian testimony to

¹ L. W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation*. The writer is engaged on a new critical edition. For the moment one of the best, and the most convenient English translation, is that of A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*² (Third (corrected) Impression, 1963).

² A Heidel, op. cit., p. 12.

³ E. A. Speiser apud J. B. Pritchard, *A.N.E.T.* (1950, 1955), p. 60.

⁴ Where possible, reference is given to a published source, but in some cases, such as where unpublished materials are used, this has not been practicable.

⁵ The most recent translations are: A. Schott and W. von Soden, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos* (1958); E. A. Speiser apud J. B. Pritchard, *A.N.E.T.*² (1955), pp. 72-99; A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*² (1949).

these birds is that of the priest Berossus, some 300 B.C. That edition of the *Gilgamesh Epic* which contains the flood story is the latest; no copies earlier than 750 B.C. are known, though it was a traditional text, and the late form may well have been put in shape between 1200 and 1000 B.C. Parts of earlier editions survive, for its origins go back, at least in Sumerian, to the third millennium, but none of them is known to have contained any flood narrative. In the late edition it is a digression, and was inserted from another Sumero-Babylonian epic, known in its later forms from the hero of the flood, Atra-ḫasis. The Sumerian prototype, of which one incomplete copy of about 1800 B.C. alone survives, is very concise and its account of the flood has no mention of birds.¹ The first Babylonian edition known, from copies of about 1600 B.C., is incomplete, but so far there is nothing about birds. The late Babylonian editions are similarly incomplete.² Thus the only surviving testimony to the most telling parallel happens to be later than the Biblical account, but nevertheless I hold that there is certain dependence of the Hebrew writers on a Mesopotamian tradition. First, there is no dispute that the late Mesopotamian forms of the flood story are local developments of the earlier Sumerian accounts, and these we know from copies of about 1800 B.C. This virtually excludes any possible Amorite influence in the initial formation of the Mesopotamian tradition. Thus priority rests on the Mesopotamian side, where floods are an annual phenomenon. Secondly, it is inconceivable that the Hebrews as such influenced the development of Babylonian epics. There seem, then, to be only two ways of escape from acknowledging Hebrew borrowing. The one is to assert that both Sumerians and Amorites held independent flood traditions, and from the latter the episode of the birds passed to both Hebrews and Babylonians. I can think of no refutation of such a view, though it seems most improbable to me. Alternatively it could be argued that the Hebrew and Babylonian accounts go back to the event rather than to a common source of tradition. This is unacceptable to me for reasons to be explained later.

Neither in Mesopotamia nor in Palestine did the flood story stand alone. In Berossus ten long-reigning kings precede it.³ A similar tradition, but of nine kings, occurs on a bilingual fragment from Ashurbanipal's library. Several Sumerian tablets from about 1800 B.C. attest this line of kings, but either eight or ten in number, extending from the

¹ The only translations of this are by A. Poebel, *Historical Texts* (1914), pp. 17-20; and by S. N. Kramer apud *A.N.E.T.*, pp. 42-44.

² See provisionally W. G. Lambert, 'New Light on the Babylonian Flood', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, v (1960), pp. 113-23. A new edition based on much new material is being prepared by the present writer and A. R. Millard.

³ F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, iii C (1958), pp. 373-82.

beginning of civilization to the flood.¹ The Sumerian prototype of the *Atra-ḫasis Epic* lacks the kings, but describes the founding of the five cities in which they are said to have reigned. In Genesis the ten long-lived patriarchs from Adam to Noah lead up to the flood. It appears certain to me that this is no coincidence, and since the Sumerian character of this traditional history assures priority on the Mesopotamian side, borrowing on the part of the Hebrews seems certain.

The creation narratives are altogether more difficult. We shall start from the beginning of the first biblical account. Much has been made of the similarity of the Hebrew *tehom* and the Babylonian *Tiāmat* in *Enūma Eliš*. Both are primaeval and watery. The etymological equivalence is of no consequence, since poetic allusions to cosmic battles in the Old Testament use *yām* and *tehom* indiscriminately. So far as the concept is concerned, the idea of a watery beginning was by no means the only Mesopotamian notion. There were three basic doctrines. According to the most commonly attested, earth came first and all else emerged in some way from this. Less commonly attested is the conception of primaeval water, and thirdly time was considered the source and origin of all things. Earth in this cosmological sense is first attested about 2600 B.C. Water is not known before 2000, and time makes its first appearance about 1700 B.C. Since the evidence for all three is scanty, these dates have no absolute value. In contrast with these different Mesopotamian ideas, the ancient Egyptians quite generally acknowledged the god of the primaeval waters Nu (Nun) as the source of all things.² In early Greece there were different opinions, as in Mesopotamia, but Ocean is described as the father (*γένεσις*) of the gods in Homer,³ and water is the prime element in the cosmologies of Thales and Anaximander. Thus the watery beginning of Genesis in itself is no evidence of Mesopotamian influence.

The activity of the second day is more explicit. God divided the cosmic waters into two parts on the vertical plane. Similarly in *Enūma Eliš* Marduk splits the body of *Tiāmat*. These seem to be the only two examples of the splitting of a body of water from the area and periods under discussion (apart from Berossus),⁴ so a parallel must be acknowledged. However, Gunkel and his followers have wanted to push the

¹ See T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (1939), and J. J. Finkelstein and W. W. Hallo, both in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, xvii (1963), pp. 39 ff. and 52 ff. The bilingual fragment has been joined to another previously unpublished piece, see *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, part xlvi (1965), no. 5.

² See H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (1952), pp. 535-6; and Otto Kaiser, op. cit., pp. 1-39.

³ *Iliad*, xiv. 201.

⁴ F. Jacoby, op. cit., pp. 370-3.

matter further. In *Enūma Eliš* a battle precedes the splitting, and since there are poetic allusions to a battle of Yahweh with the sea, it is urged that there is dependence on *Enūma Eliš*, and that a battle did precede the separation of the waters in earlier forms of the tradition recorded in Genesis i. This involves most intricate problems. This splitting, whether in *Enūma Eliš* or Genesis is, of course, only a variant of the common mythological theme of the dividing of heaven and earth,¹ the only difference being that these two accounts involve water, not a solid mass. This separation of heaven and earth does not necessarily presume a conflict. There are three Sumerian versions,² and in none is the matter being cut asunder the body of a monster slain in battle. The whole process is peaceful: a job of work. In a version in the Hittite language a saw is used to do the cutting, not a weapon of war.³ In Egypt Shu pushes apart Nut, the heaven, and Geb, the earth, without any antecedent battle.⁴ The doctrine of the world egg, as found in some forms of Phoenician⁵ and Orphic⁶ cosmogony, similarly involves a peaceful sundering.

Is there, then, good reason to presume a battle behind the second day of creation in Genesis? The poetic allusions nowhere speak of Yahweh splitting the sea, except for Ps. lxxiv. 13 in the traditional English rendering: 'Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength.' However, the meaning of פִּזְרָה has been disputed on purely lexicographical evidence, and an Arabic cognate favours rather: 'Thou didst set the sea in commotion.'⁷ Thus the case for a battle as a prelude to God's dividing of the cosmic waters is unproven.

On the Mesopotamian side the matter is very confused. Tiāmat is not uniform in the *Epic of Creation*. At times she is presented as a solid-bodied monster, at other times as a mass of water. The author is conflating two traditions. Berossus combined the two traditions more

¹ See W. Staudacher, *Die Trennung von Himmel und Erde* (1942); K. Marót, same title, *Acta Antiqua Hungarica*, i (1951), pp. 35-66; F. K. Numazawa, *Scientia*, xlvii (1953), pp. 28-35 (last two references provided by R. T. Rundle Clark).

² S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (1944), p. 37; T. Jacobsen, *J.N.E.S.*, v (1946), p. 134; E. Ebeling, *Z.D.M.G.*, lxx (1916), p. 532; and A. Heidel, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

³ H. G. Güterbock, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vi (1952), pp. 29, 52-54. The meaning of the Hittite word is not certain, though the translation 'saw' rests on etymology. It is not the name of any known weapon.

⁴ H. Bonnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 685-9; R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (1959), pp. 48-50, 250.

⁵ See H. W. Haussig (ed.), *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, I. Abteilung, Teil 1, pp. 309-10.

⁶ W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*² (1952), ch. iv.

⁷ So L. Koehler, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (1953), p. 782.

systematically: he presents Tiāmat advancing against Marduk as a woman yet at the same moment as a body of water so that monsters are swimming inside her!¹ To me this is obviously a combination of two ideas. The question is whether the separating of the body of water really belongs to the dragon-slaying episode, or is just hitched on, to the greater glory of Marduk. To answer this question we must survey briefly the Mesopotamian traditions of cosmic water. The only one known from the Sumerians pictured a watery goddess Nammu as the mother of heaven and earth and of all the gods. She, however, was not split and no battle with her is known of. Another view, associated especially with Marduk, makes the primaeval waters a substratum merely on which the earth was placed. In some cases the water was an impersonal passive element, in other cases this sea had to be subjugated before the work of creation could be done on top of it. In either case there is no splitting: all the water stays below. Thus *Enūma Eliš* and Berossus have something unique so far in Mesopotamia. No other tradition of a watery beginning involves the separation.

One other aspect remains, the cultic. Although much that has been written on this subject is altogether wrong, there is good circumstantial evidence that Marduk defeated Tiāmat each New Year in the Akitu house of Babylon.² But this only applies to Babylon in the time of the Late Babylonian empire, not to any other Akitu house of any other city. There are only very scrappy hints about the precise conception of Tiāmat involved in this annual rite, but they all savour of underworld connexions, which means that concept of a sea beneath the earth, not of a sea both above and beneath. Too much has been made of the recitation of *Enūma Eliš* in the New Year rites. The epilogue contradicts the suggestion that it was written expressly for use in the month Nisan, and nothing in the formulation of the epic implies a specific cultic use.

We are left, then, with the fact that the sequence of the battle and the splitting of the cosmic waters may be only the result of conflation of no particular antiquity, and it is only one of two traditions associated with a single Mesopotamian god. *Enūma Eliš* is the first testimony to it. Thus neither on the Hebrew side nor on the Mesopotamian is there any clear proof that a battle is necessarily tied to the dividing of the waters. More generally, there is no proof that the conflict of a deity with the sea is of Mesopotamian origin. So far it is only known in the cult and literature of Babylon. It was an Amorite dynasty that made Babylon from an unimportant settlement into the capital of an empire, and it is

¹ F. Jacoby, *op. cit.*, pp. 371-2.

² W. G. Lambert, *Iraq*, xxv (1963), pp. 189-90.

always possible that they introduced the ideas into Mesopotamia. If so, the Babylonians were as much borrowers as the Hebrews.

To sum up discussion of the second day, there is one close parallel between Genesis and *Enūma Eliš*, but no evidence of Hebrew borrowing from Babylon.

The third day can be dealt with more briefly. God separates the sea from the dry land. My opinion is that the second and third days contain originally unrelated traditions, put in this sequence by the Hebrew author. Three clear poetic allusions refer to Yahweh's pushing back the cosmic waters from the land and defining their limits: Ps. civ. 6-9, Prov. viii. 29, and Job xxxviii. 8-11. A conflict is definitely involved. The last passage is the most explicit: the section occurs in a cosmological setting, and involves not simply the separation of sea and dry land, but tells of the waters breaking forth 'from the womb' and being forced back by God within fixed limits. There is a Mesopotamian parallel for this, connected with Ninurta, the Sumero-Babylonian god of war, who was, incidentally, the dragon-slayer of ancient Mesopotamia. The story goes that 'the mighty waters' began to rise and threatened to overwhelm the land, so Ninurta built a stone wall to hold them back until eventually they receded. Thereby Ninurta saved the land. This is part of a composite Sumerian myth first known from copies of about 1800 B.C., though later bilingual copies also survive.¹ There seems to be an allusion to this one episode in Cylinder A of Gudea of Lagash (c. 2100 B.C.), who describes how he went into the house of Ninurta and prayed to him, beginning, 'Lord, who held back the savage waters . . .'.² This Mesopotamian story reads very much like an account of the annual flood projected on to the mythological plane. The parallel with the Hebrew material is striking, since these seem to be the only two narratives of a god holding back savage waters from the ancient Orient. It is true that the water is conceived somewhat differently in the Old Testament: there it is sea, a term not used of Ninurta's exploit. But if the account were of Mesopotamian origin and had been borrowed in Syria and Palestine, where there is no annual flood, it would be very natural for such a change to take place. Since it is a traditional Sumerian myth, it is quite possible that this is the correct explanation of the facts.

For me the seventh day of creation offers a still more convincing case. The sabbath has, of course, been the subject of much study, both the

¹ There is no adequate edition of this myth, but for what it is worth mention may be made of the edition of this particular section by H. Radau, *Sumerian Hymns and Prayers to God Nin-ib from the Temple Library of Nippur* (1911), pp. 66-70.

² A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (1953), p. 146.

institution and the name. My own position, briefly, is that the Hebrew term *šabbāth*, meaning the completion of the week, and the Babylonian term *šapattu*, meaning the completion of the moon's waxing, that is the fifteenth day of a lunar month, are the same word. But since there is no genuine Sumerian equivalent of, nor Babylonian etymology for, *šapattu*, and it first appears only about 1700 B.C., I believe that Hebrews and Babylonians depend on a similar Amorite source.¹ The attempt to find days of rest in the Mesopotamian calendars has hardly succeeded.² There is, however, another approach to the question. The Hebrews left two explanations of the sabbath. The first is that of Gen. i-ii and Exod. xx, that it repeats cyclically what God did in the original week of creation. The second, in Deut. v, regards it as a repeated memorial of the Hebrews' deliverance from Egypt. This divergence suggests that historically the institution is older than the explanations. On this assumption the use of the week as the framework of a creation account is understandable as providing divine sanction for the institution, but unexpected in that God's resting hardly expresses the unlimited might and power that are His usual attributes: 'See, Israel's guardian neither slumbers nor sleeps.' It is generally assumed that the use of the week as the framework of the account simply required that God rest on the seventh day. But there was no compulsion to have a week of creation at all. Furthermore, this implies that the development of the doctrine of God's rest came from pure, deductive reasoning, which I doubt very much. The authors of ancient cosmologies were essentially compilers. Their originality was expressed in new combinations of old themes, and in new twists to old ideas. Sheer invention was not part of their craft. Thus when the author tells us that God rested, I believe he drew on a tradition to this effect. Therefore in seeking parallels to the seventh day, one must look not only for comparable institutions, but also for the idea of deities resting.

Here Mesopotamia does not fail us. The standard Babylonian account of man's creation is not found in *Enūma Eliš*, but in the *Atra-ḫasis* epic. An earlier form of this myth occurs in the Sumerian *Enki and Ninnmah*.³

¹ The best discussion of this word is still that of B. Landsberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Babylonier und Assyrer* (1915), pp. 131-5.

² The various Babylonian calendars have *dies fas* and *dies nefas* just like the Roman, but the latter are not really days of rest. The nearest approach to the Hebrew Sabbath is offered by the prohibitions for the king (nothing is said about the people) to be observed on the seventh day of each month, which forbid both secular and religious activities. The best summary of information on this topic is B. Landsberger, op. cit., pp. 92 ff.

³ The literature on this myth is given by M. Lambert in *Revue d'Assyriologie*, lv (1961), pp. 186-7, no. 18, but there is no edition of the text.

The essentials of the story are that the gods had to toil for their daily bread, and in response to urgent complaints man was created to serve the gods by providing them with food and drink. On the last point all the Mesopotamian accounts agree: man existed solely to serve the gods, and this was expressed practically in that all major deities at least had two meals set up before their statues each day. Accordingly, man's creation resulted in the gods' resting, and the myths reach a climax at this point. Even in *Enūma Eliš* this is clear, despite much conflation. At the beginning of Tablet VI Ea and Marduk confer on what is called 'the resting of the gods', and thereupon man is created and the gods are declared free from toil. This common Mesopotamian tradition thus provides a close parallel to the sixth and seventh days of creation. Since the particular concept of the destiny of man goes back to the Sumerians, but is unparalleled in other parts of the ancient Near East, ultimate borrowing by the Hebrews seems very probable.

These, in my opinion, are the significant points of similarity between Mesopotamian and Hebrew accounts of origins. Other scholars, from the time of George Smith and onwards, have attached importance to other points, though to me they are inconclusive.¹ No sure Babylonian parallels have yet been found even for the Tower of Babel or the kingdom of Nimrod.² We are left, then, with the succession of long-lived

¹ A collection of such material is given by J. Plessis in *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, ed. L. Pirot, Tome Premier (1928), pp. 714 ff., and detailed comparisons of *Enūma Eliš* and Genesis have been made by A. Deimel, *'Enūma Eliš' und Hexaemeron* (1934), and by A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*² (1963), ch. iii. Among the more recent and reputable suggestions of particular scholars the following may be noted. W. F. Albright in *J.B.L.* lxii (1943), p. 369, on the basis of the translation of Gen. i. 1, 'When God began to create . . .', proposed a definite borrowing from a Sumero-Babylonian 'When . . . then . . .' period. S. H. Langdon, in his book *Sumerian Epic of Paradise, the Flood and the Fall of Man* (1915), also in French translation, *Le Poème sumérien du paradis, du déluge et de la chute de l'homme* (1919), tried to relate a Sumerian myth to more than one episode of Genesis, but wrongly. See the altogether more reliable edition of the same text by S. N. Kramer, *Enki and Ninhursag, A Sumerian 'Paradise' Myth (B.A.S.O.R., Supplementary Studies, no. 1, 1945)*. On p. 9 of this new edition Kramer suggests a connexion between the word play on the Sumerian homophones *ti* 'life' and *ti* 'rib' and the fashioning of Eve ('Life') from the rib of Adam. In this he was anticipated by V. Scheil, *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* (1915), pp. 534-5. The relevance of this Sumerian myth for the location of Eden has been maintained by E. A. Speiser, 'The Rivers of Paradise', *Festschrift J. Friedrich* (1959), pp. 473-85. The name Eden itself has often been derived from the Sumerian *'edin*, 'open country, desert', though the *'ayin* is inexplicable, and the meaning unsuitable. Also the *'ed* (of unknown meaning) in Gen. ii. 6 has been given at least two Mesopotamian etymologies, on which see most recently E. A. Speiser, *B.A.S.O.R.* cxl (1955), pp. 9-11. J. J. A. Van Dijk in *Acta Orientalia*, xxviii (1964), pp. 40-44, has pointed out a Sumerian parallel to the content of this part of Genesis.

² E. A. Speiser in 'Word Plays on the Creation Epic's Version of the Founding

worthies culminating in the flood, perhaps God's holding back of the primeval waters, and, more probably, God's rest. So far the similarities have been stressed, but the differences must not be overlooked. The Sumero-Babylonian tradition is of a line of kings from the founding of civilization to the flood, not of a line of patriarchs, the ancestors of the Hebrew nation, from creation onwards. In the one case the names are mostly Sumerian, but Semitic in the other, nor do they bear any kind of relationship to the corresponding name in the other series. The differences are indeed so great that direct borrowing of a literary form of Mesopotamian traditions is out of the question. But if the case for borrowing is to be established, at least a suggestion of the manner and time of transference must be made. The exile and the later part of the monarchy are out of the question, since this was the time when the Hebrew traditions of creation and the early history of mankind were being put in the form in which they were canonized. That the matters spoken of were included in Genesis is proof that they were long established among the Hebrews. Kaufmann has rightly argued that prophetic use of the traditions of Yahweh's battle with the sea implies that these traditions were therefore long established on Hebrew soil. Thus one is forced back at least to the time of the Judges, and even this may be too late. Also, knowledge of this time does not suggest that Babylonian myths and legends would have gained currency then if they were not established earlier. The present writer's opinion is that only the Amarna period has any real claim to be the period when this material moved westwards. This is the period when the Babylonian language and cuneiform script were the normal means of international communication between countries from Egypt to the Persian Gulf. From within this period the Hittite capital in Asia Minor has yielded a large quantity of fragments of Mesopotamian literature, both Sumerian and Babylonian, including the *Gilgamesh Epic*. A smaller quantity of similar material has been yielded by Ras Shamra, including a piece of the *Atra-ḫasis Epic*.¹ Megiddo has given up a piece of the *Gilgamesh Epic*,² and Amarna itself several pieces of Babylonian literary texts. This spread of Babylonian writings at this period of history is not only the result of the use of

of Babylon', *Orientalia*, N.S., xxv (1956), pp. 317-23, put forward an ingenious theory of a literary derivation of the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel from the Babylonian *Enūma Eliš*. Also, in *Eretz-Israel*, v (1958), pp. 32*-36*, he proposed that the biblical Nimrod is a dim reflection of the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (c. 1240-1200 B.C.). The present writer prefers the more usual opinion that the Sumero-Babylonian war god Ninurta is meant.

¹ To be published by J. Nougayrol in a forthcoming volume of *Le Palais royal d'Ugarit*; see *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* (1960), 170-1. ² A. Goetze and S. Levy, *'atigot*, ii (1959), pp. 121-8.

cuneiform writing for international communication, but also is owed to the cultural activities of the Hurrians, for they were great borrowers from all the peoples in which they moved and settled, so much so that they were rapidly absorbed and lost their identity. Thus in the Amarna age the Hittites not only had Babylonian and Sumerian literature in addition to native texts, but also works translated from West Semitic.¹ Cultural barriers were indeed broken down in Syria and adjacent lands at this time. Nor was knowledge of borrowed Mesopotamian works restricted to the small number of scribes competent in cuneiform. Among the Hittites the *Gilgamesh Epic* was available in both Hittite and Hurrian translations. Also that version of *Nergal and Ereshkigal* from Amarna is so completely different from the traditional Mesopotamian one in its wording as to give the impression that oral tradition alone will explain it.²

Earlier borrowing of the material is ruled out, in the present writer's opinion, because Genesis shows no knowledge of Mesopotamian matters prior to 1500 B.C., a point of considerable importance. The description of Nimrod's kingdom and the account of the Tower of Babel both presume a period when legends were clustering around the city of Babylon. Up to the sudden and unexpected rise of Babylon under Hammurabi (c. 1750 B.C.) it was an utterly unimportant and obscure place. One must surely allow a century or two before it could become the centre of legends about early times, as indeed it did in Mesopotamia by about 1200 B.C. Negatively the case is equally strong: Genesis shows no knowledge of Mesopotamian matters prior to about 1500. The very existence of the Sumerians is nowhere hinted at. While the borrowing may have been something altogether more involved and complex than we have suggested, all the known facts favour the idea that the traditions moved westwards during the Amarna period and reached the Hebrews in oral form.

W. G. LAMBERT

¹ H. G. Güterbock in S. N. Kramer (ed.), *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (1961), pp. 143 and 155.

² See O. R. Gurney, *Anatolian Studies*, x (1960), p. 107.

THE EDMITE KING-LIST OF GENESIS XXXVI. 31-39 AND 1 CHRON. I. 43-50

And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel. And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom; and the name of his city was Dinhabah. And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead. And Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his stead. And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Avith. And Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead. And Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth by the River reigned in his stead. And Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead. And Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar¹ reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Pau²; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-zahab³. (R.V.)

¹ In 1 Chron. i. 50, and some ancient authorities, *Hadad*.

² In 1 Chron. i. 50, *Pai*.

³ 1 Chron. i. 51 concludes this passage with the further note, 'And Hadad died'.

THIS well-known list of kings, apparently a unit of traditional material once independent of its present setting, raises a considerable number of historical and geographical problems and possibilities. What was the nature of these kings 'in Edom'? Does the phraseology of the list suggest that the kings who reigned 'in Edom' were kings 'of Edom' (cf. Num. xx. 14) or 'over Edom'—or does it suggest that they ruled over smaller districts within the land of Edom? What is the connexion between the kings and the various places named with them—are they birth-places, capital cities of Edom, or centres of local rule? After the death of each king, another 'reigned in his stead'—but what is the principle of succession? We are told that kings reigned in the land of Edom 'before there reigned any king over the children of Israel'; can we be more precise about the dating of these kings? And lastly, it would be interesting to know something of the previous literary and oral history of this list of non-Israelite kings, unique in the Old Testament.

I

If we consider this last problem first, we may be struck by two things. First, the kings are connected in sequence by a simple formula: '... died, and ... reigned in his stead.' This phrase reminds us of the formulas used by the Deuteronomistic history writer and by the Chronicler for the kings of Judah and Israel; but there is a difference in the usage. The