ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

Relating to the Old Testament

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Creation of Man by the Mother Goddess

The basic theme of this myth is the creation of man out of clay mixed with the flesh and blood of a slain god. Unfortunately, the Old Babylonian text which deals with this subject (A) is incomplete and in a singularly poor state of preservation. Furthermore, the account came to be used as part of an incantation to facilitate childbirth, with the result that the myth itself seems to have been restated only in its bare outlines. It is too important, however, to be ignored, in spite of its lacunae and its uncertainties.

The ritual part of this Old Babylonian text agrees closely with the concluding portion of the Assyrian Version of the Atrahasis Epic—a fact which was first recognized by E. Ebeling. Accordingly, the Assyrian analogue in question has been detached from the Atrahasis Epic—with which it has only an incidental connection—and has been appended in this place as Version B.

Texts: (A) T. G. Pinches, CT, vi (1898), Pl. 5; republished with minor changes by S. Langdon, UM, x, 1 (1915), Pls. ii-iv. (B) L. W. King, CT, xv (1902), Pl. 49, col. iv, and K. D. Macmillan, Beiträge zur Assyriologie, v (1906), 688. Principal edition and translation: E. Ebeling, Tod und Leben (1931), No. 37, pp. 172-77. Other translations: (A, obverse only) Langdon, op. cit., 25-26, and Heidel, BG2, 66-67. (B) P. Jensen, KB, vi, 1, 286-87, and Heidel, GE, 115-16. The line count here followed is that of Ebeling, loc. cit.

OLD BABYLONIAN TEXT

(verse)

(preceding column and top of the present column destroyed)

"That which is slight he shall raise to abundance;
The work of god's man shall bear!"

The goddess they called to enquire,4
The middle of the gods, the wise Mami:
"Thou art the mother-womb,
The one who creates mankind.
Create, then, Lullu and let him bear the yoke!
The yoke he shall bear, . . ."] (10)
Nintu opened her mouth,
Saying to the great gods:
"With me is the doing of (this) not suitable;6
With Enki is (this) work (proper)!
He purifies everything,
Let him give me the clay, then I will do (it)!
Enki opened his mouth,
Saying to the great gods:
"On the first of the month, the seventh and fifteenth days,
I will prepare a purification, a bath.

1 Tod und Leben (1931), 172.
2 It starts, however, with the first intelligible line and not with the first line of which there is any trace. Although Ebeling's additions and interpretations are offered with great reserve, they are not uniformly satisfactory.
3 Read: i-su-il-ilim with von Soden, Orientilas NS, xxvi (1957), 308.
4 Read: i-su-il-ilim with von Soden, ibid.
5 I.e. "the savage, the first man." C. The Creation Epic, VI, 6, p. 68, n. 86. Lullu corresponds in effect to Adam.
6 Read: i-su-il-ilim with von Soden, Orientilas NS, xxvi (1957), 308.
Let one god be slain,  
And let the gods be purified by immersion  
In his flesh and his blood.  
Let Nintu mix clay,  
God and man,  
Let them together be smeared with clay.  
Unto eternity let us hear the drum.”

(remainder of obverse too fragmentary for translation)

[ . . . ] her breast,  
[ . . . ] the beard,  
[ . . . ] the cheek of the man.  
[ . . . ] and the raising  
[ . . . ] of both eyes, the wife and her husband.  
Fourteen mother[k]-wombs were assembled.  
[ . . . ]" Nintu,  
[Co]unts the months.  
In the tenth month[ they called [the mistress of] destinies,  
[N]inshubar came,  
With the . . . she opened the womb,  
Her face brightened[ with joy,  
Her head was covered,  
[ . . . ] made an opening,  
That which was in her came forth.11  
She blessed (it). She . . . . . . .  
"It is I who created (it), . . . made (it),  
Let the midwives rejoice in the house  
of the one in travail!  
Where the Bearing One[ gives birth and  
The mother herself suckles children.”

(Assyrian version)

(beginning mutilated)

[ . . . ] they kis[s]ed her feet,  
[Saying: “The creatress of mankind] we call thee;  
[The mistress of all the gods be thy name I” (10)  
They went] to the House of Fate,  
[Nin]igu-Ea (and) the wise Mama.  
Fourteen mother[k]-wombs were assembled  
To tread upon the [clay before her.13  
[ . . . ] Ea says, as he recites the incantation.  
Sitting before her, Ea Lauses her to recite the incantation.  
[Mama recit]ed the incantation; when she completed14  
[her] incantation,  
[ . . . ] she drew upon her clay.  
[Fourteen pie]ces she pinched off; seven pieces she  
placed on the right.  
[Seven pie]ces she placed on the left; between  
them she placed a brick.

1 One of the names of the mother goddess.
8 von Soden, loc. cit., restores: [ma(f)-rat(?)] =at1) “the daughter of.”
9 Read: i-ti-;i-i(?).
10 Var. “had recited”.
13 Apparently a reference to the mother goddess.
14 Var. “had recited.”
15 Of the brick figure?
16 von Soden, ZAS, 11 (1932), 112-113 n. 34 (p. 114).

A Cosmological Incantation:  
The Worm and the Toothache

Among the incantations which contain cosmological material,  
one of the best-known attributes toothache to a worm that had  
obtained the permission of the gods to dwell among the teeth  
and gums. The present text, which is designated ideographically  
as an “Incantation against Toothache,” dates from Neo-Babylonian  
times and was published by R. Campbell Thompson in  
CT, xvi (1903), Pl. 46. But the colophon indicates that the copy  
had been made from an ancient text. And indeed, the Mari  
documents of the Old Babylonian period include a tablet with  
the Akkadian label ti-pa-at tu-ul-tim “Toothache Incantation.”  
The text itself, however, is in Hurrian. But although it cites  
various deities of the Hurrian pantheon—and is thus closely  
religious in nature—the context does not correspond to the Neo-
Babylonian legend, to judge from the intelligible portions.


After Anu [had created heaven],  
Heaven had created [the earth],  
The earth had created the rivers,  
The rivers had created the canals,  
The canals had created the marsh.  
(And) the marsh had created the worm—  
The worm went, weeping, before Shamash,  
His tears flowing before Ea:  
“What wilt thou give for my food?  
What wilt thou give me for my sucking?”  
“I shall give thee the ripe fig,  
(And) the apricot.”  
“And what use are they to me, the ripe fig  
And the apricot?  
Lift me up and among the teeth  
And the gums cause me to dwell!  
The blood of the tooth I will suck.

10 Of the brick figure?