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NEW BABYLONIAN 'GENESIS' STORY

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Association of the Hebrew accounts of Creation and the Flood with the Babylonian is a commonplace of Old Testament studies. It is now some ninety years since George Smith's discoveries of a Flood story in Akkadian very similar to the story of Noah, and of tales of the creation of the earth.¹ During that time many studies have been made of the interrelationship of the various accounts. The following expression by G. von Rad represents a widespread current view with regard to the Flood of Genesis. 'Today . . . the dossier on the relation of the Biblical tradition to the Babylonian story of the Flood as it is in the Gilgamesh Epic is more or less closed. A material relationship between both versions exists, of course, but one no longer assumes a direct dependence of the Biblical tradition on the Babylonian. Both versions are independent arrangements of a still, older tradition, which itself stemmed perhaps from the Sumerian. Israel met with a Flood tradition in Canaan at the time of her immigration and assimilated it into her religious ideas.² The situation is similar, though less certain, with regard to Creation. Most commentators suggest that the Israelites adopted and adapted the Babylonian, story *Enuma elish* as transmitted through Canaanite sources.³ The few dissentient voices are largely ignored.⁴

Old Testament scholars have generally concentrated upon

¹ See G. Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*, Sampson Low, London (1876).

² *Genesis*, SCM Press, London (1961) 120.

³ E.g. C. A. Simpson in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Abingdon Press, New York (1952) I, 195, 445f.; S. H. Hooke in M. Black and H. H. Rowley (eds.), *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Nelson, London (1962) §§144, 145; S. G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East*, Hodder Stoughton, London (1963) 118-157.

⁴ Such as A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*², University of Chicago Press (1954) 139, or J. V. Kinnier Wilson in D. W. Thomas (ed.), *Documents from Old Testament Times*, Nelson, London (1958) 14.

the famous *Enuma elish* in considering the Creation stories, neglecting the other Babylonian accounts entirely. In fact, the relevance of *Enuma elish* is considerably less than has normally been thought, as an important paper by W. G. Lambert has recently demonstrated. This conclusion, in part, follows from the dating of the composition of *Enuma elish* at the very end of the second millennium BC, in part, from a study of Babylonian Creation accounts as a whole. Although *Enuma elish* embodies earlier material, this is clearly turned to the poem's main purpose, the exaltation of Marduk, patron of Babylon. Scrutiny of all Babylonian Creation stories is essential before theories can be erected upon apparent similarities with the Hebrew. The significance of such similarities will only appear when each has been evaluated in its own context.

Fewer complications attend comparison of the Flood stories. A. Heidel's book *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*⁶ remains the authoritative study of the theme. The Babylonian material to be utilized is found in two compositions only, the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Epic of Atrahasis.

THE EPIC OF ATRAHASIS

Our present purpose is to add more information concerning the Creation and Flood stories rather than to reconsider the whole of this material. The Epic of Atrahasis provides most of this new material. Until 1965 about one-fifth of the story was known, now four-fifths of the whole can be restored. Briefly, it recounts the events precipitating the creation of man, namely, the refusal of the gods to tend the earth, his disturbance of Enlil, the god ruling the earth, and the attempts to quell the trouble, culminating in the Flood and subsequent reorganization of the earth.⁷ The most complete text belongs to the Old Babylonian period and bears dates about 1630 BC. How much earlier it was actually composed cannot yet be said. At that time the poem was con-

⁵ *JTS* NS 16 (1965) 287-300.

⁶ Second edition, University of Chicago Press (1949).

⁷ The text is mostly published in Cuneiform Texts XLVI, The British Museum, London (1965) pls. I—XXVII; an edition of the Epic with translation and discussion by W. G. Lambert and the writer is in preparation; understanding of the text owes much to the acumen of Lambert. Parts of this paper are based upon a thesis submitted to the University of London, 1966, entitled *The Atrahasis Epic and Its Place in Babylonian Literature*.

tained on three large tablets, consisting together of 1,245 lines of writing. Parts of four copies of the first tablet, two of the second, and one of the third are known at present. In addition, the Assyrian libraries at Nineveh almost a thousand years later included at least three copies equivalent to the first tablet, two covering parts of the first and second, and two of the third, showing evidence of varying editions. A neo-Babylonian fragment was unearthed at Babylon, and a piece of uncertain date, probably Kassite, at Nippur. The story was thus well known, or, at least, widely available, in ancient Mesopotamia. It circulated further afield, too. A tablet from the Hittite capital, Bogazköy, mentioning the hero Atrahasis, shows that something of the story was known there, about 1300 BC.⁸ At the same period a copy of a form of the Epic was present at Ugarit on the Syrian coast.⁹ Thus knowledge of the Epic of Atrahasis was very far flung in the second millennium BC.

As far as can be observed the significance of this composition for Genesis studies has not been noted by Old Testament scholarship in recent years, although its nature as an account covering both Creation and Flood was clearly demonstrated ten years ago from the material then available.¹⁰ It is the only Babylonian parallel to the Hebrew Genesis in providing a continuous narrative of the first era of human existence.

The import of this is immediately apparent: comparisons of accounts from the two literatures made heretofore have generally treated the Creation and the Flood as separate parts—necessarily so since no all-embracing Babylonian narrative was recognized. Some modification of this statement is necessary, for there is one Sumerian composition covering the ground. That is the Deluge Tablet from Nippur of which about one-third survives. It can be dated about 1700 BC. A discussion of its place in comparative contexts was published by the Assyriologist L. W. King fifty years ago.¹¹ It is now evident that this Sumerian narrative belongs to the same tradition as the

⁸ *Keilshrifturkunden aus Boghazköi VIII*, Staatlichen Museen, Berlin (1924) No. 63; cf. H. G. Güterbock, *Kumarbi*, Europaverlag, Zürich (1946) 30f., 81f.

⁹ J. Nougayrol, *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* (1960) 170-171

¹⁰ J. Laessøe, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 13 (1956) 90-102; cf. W. G. Lambert, *JSS* 5 1960 113-116.

¹¹ *Legends of Babylonia and Egypt in relation to Hebrew Tradition*, Schweich Lectures for 1916 Oxford University Press (1918).

Atrahasis Epic. It differs from the latter in including before the Flood a list of five cities founded as cult-centres for particular deities. Here an association can be made with the Sumerian King List, for these same five cities (Eridu, Bad-tibira, Larak, Sippar, Shuruppak) are given as the seats of the ante-diluvian kings (incidentally, they were never dynastic centres after the Deluge). The association is not merely a modern one; a small fragment of a neo-Assyrian tablet lists these kings and then continues with a narrative, using a phrase characteristic of the Atrahasis Epic.¹² As is well known, the King List has a complete break with the coming of the Flood, and a fresh start afterwards. While this may be the result of joining a list of ante-diluvian rulers to the later King List, it establishes that there was a tradition linking Creation, early kings, and the Flood in Babylonia, reaching back to the early second millennium BC at least.

It is possible that the Atrahasis Epic was compiled from separate narratives of the two major events, and the Sumerian Deluge Tablet likewise. In their present form, however, neither shows any sign of a conflation of sources. An attempt to isolate literary 'strata' in the fragments of the Atrahasis Epic known ten years ago fails completely in the light of the new material.¹³

COMPARISON WITH THE HEBREW GENESIS

I. *The beginning of the world.* No account of the creation of the world is found in the Atrahasis Epic; it is concerned exclusively with the story of Man and his relationship with the gods, and this is hinted at in the incipit 'When the gods, man-like, . . .'. The introduction does describe the situation at the outset of the story, when the world had been divided between the three major deities of the Sumerian-Akkadian pantheon.

'The gods took one hand in the other,
They cast the lot, made division.
Anu went up to heaven,

¹² See T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, University of Chicago Press (1939); *Cuneiform Texts*, XLVI, p1. XXIII, No. 5.

¹³ J. Laessoe, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 13 (1956) 95-96. Similarly, efforts to demonstrate the fusion of two disparate narratives into the Flood story of Gilgamesh XI, based upon 'doublets' of names and supposed contradictions or inconsistencies, can be disproved as shown in chapter 7 § i.c of the thesis mentioned in n.7.

[Enlil] . . . the earth to his subjects.
 The lock, the bar of the sea,
 They gave to Enki, the prince.'

Some interest attaches to the last of these realms. The word for 'sea', is *tiāmtu*, the common noun from which the name Tiamat was developed. There is no need to consider the identity of this word and תְּהוֹם; theories concerning, or based upon, that equivalence collapse with the demonstration that the words are no more than etymological cognates.¹⁴ The texts show that the proper name is certainly not intended in the Atrahasis Epic, nor is there any hint of a battle with the sea as found in *Enuma elish*. Nevertheless, the implication is that the sea is an unruly element in need of control. If a parallel is to be sought in the biblical narrative it may be found in Genesis 1:9, 'Let the waters from under the heaven be gathered to one place and let the dry land appear'. This brief ordinance should be considered along with the other references to God confining the sea and preventing it from overwhelming the land. We may doubt whether it is legitimate to understand any Old Testament passage as depicting a *primaeval* battle between God and the sea. The Rahab, Leviathan, and Tannin verses do not have this implication,¹⁵ nor do the descriptions of the containing of the sea adduced by Gunkel to this end appear really convincing.¹⁶ The words employed in the three major passages (Job 38:8-11; Proverbs 8:29; Psalm 104:6-9) are not those employed elsewhere of conflict; thus they contrast with the Rahab, Leviathan, Tannin texts which clearly describe battle. They do refer to bars and bounds and doors.

Some caution should be present in drawing the parallel of the barring of the sea, as it is found in one other Babylonian Creation story, the bilingual *Marduk Account*. This text relates the creation of man and beast, rivers and vegetation, and then

¹⁴ A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* 98-101; W. G. Lambert, *loc. cit.* 293; K. A. Kitchen, *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* 44 (1966) 3.

¹⁵ K. A. Kitchen, *loc. cit.* 3-5.

¹⁶ H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen (1895) 91—111; W. G. Lambert, *loc. cit.* 296 (note that the Ninurta Epic there cited as having a parallel conflict with savage waters is describing the salvation of the land from flooding after Creation; the passage is summarized in S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*², Harper and Brothers, New York (1961) 80, 81; all the Old Testament allusions to the raging sea refer to the creation and sustaining of the world order, not to a later catastrophe).

states, 'He built up a dam at the edge of the sea'. As the next line described the draining of a swamp, this may have been related to that, but mention of the sea suggests that the dam's purpose was to keep the land from sea-floods.¹⁷

2. *Paradise*. The introductory description of the world situation in the Atrahasis Epic depicts the junior gods (the Igigu) labouring at the behest of the senior deities (the Anunnaku):

'When the gods, man-like,
Bore the labour, carried the load,
The gods' load was great,
The toil grievous, the trouble excessive.
The great Anunnaku, the Seven,
Were making the Igigu undertake the toil.'

In particular, this task took the form of digging the beds of the waterways, the *corvée* work later considered a menial occupation. Such work was too much for the gods; they held a meeting and decided to depose their taskmaster, Enlil. So they set fire to their tools and advanced to force Enlil to relieve them. It was night-time and the god slept, but his vizier awoke him, soothed his terror, and advised him to consult with his colleagues upon a means to appease the rebels. The council decided to send a messenger to enquire into the cause of the disturbance. Upon learning the state of the gods, the council further deliberated, eventually deciding to make a substitute do the work, namely Man.

No other Babylonian myth exhibits this theme in this way. The conflicts in *Enuma elish* are put down to the youthful exuberances of the gods (Tablet I:21-28), not to refusal to work. but later it is evident that the followers of Tiamat were set to work, eventually to be liberated by the creation of Man (Tablet IV: 107-121, 127; V: 147, 148; VI: 152, 153; VII: 27-9).¹⁸ A bilingual Creation story dating from at least the late second millennium¹⁹ speaks of the creation of the rivers and canals, although without naming the agent of creation, then concentrates upon the making of man to maintain them. Other

¹⁷ *Cuneiform Texts* XIII, P1. 38,1. 31. A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* 63.

¹⁸ Cf. B. Landsberger and J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *JNES* 20 (1961) 178-179.

¹⁹ E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur Religiösen Inhalts*, J. C. Heinrichs, Leipz (1919) No. 4, datable by its script to the Middle Assyrian period, *vide* E. F. Weidner, *AfO* 16 (1952-3) 207; A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* 68-71.

Akkadian texts indicate man's purpose as the upholding of earth's order so that there is produce to feed the gods.²⁰ One Sumerian myth exhibits almost all the features of this episode in the Atrahasis Epic; the introduction to the tale *Enki and Ninmah* clearly belongs to the same tradition as Atrahasis.²¹

The underlying idea of the Atrahasis Epic and the other Babylonian Creation stories, then, is that man was made to free the gods from the toil of ordering the earth to produce their food. The gods instructed the Mother-goddess (Nintu or Mami):

'Create a human to bear the yoke.
Let him bear the yoke, the task of Enlil,
Let man carry the load of the gods.'

Genesis has something in common with this. 'The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it' (2:15). However, the garden and, indeed, the rest of the earth had produced vegetation already, without great labour (although it is stated that either rainfall or irrigation was necessary, 2:5), and were at man's disposal. The rivers are named and their courses indicated, but there is no account of their formation. Only after the Fall does man really face the toil of wresting his food from a reluctant soil.

3. *The making of man.* The Atrahasis Epic is more specific on this matter than any other Babylonian Creation account.

'Let them slaughter one god,
So that all the gods may be purified by dipping.
With his flesh and blood
Let Nintu mix clay.
So let god and man be mingled
Together in the clay.

.
After she had mixed the clay,
She called the Anunna, the great gods.
The Igigu, the great gods,
Spat upon the clay.
Mami opened her mouth
And said to the great gods,

²⁰ A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* 61-63, 65-66.

²¹ See S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* 69-70; J. J. van Dijk, *Acta Orientalia* 28 (1964) 24-31.

"You commanded me a task
 And I have finished it.

 I have removed your toil,
 I have imposed your load on man."

Man was created from the flesh and blood of a slaughtered god mixed with clay. Various aspects of the slaughter do not concern us, but we note that the clay was provided by Enki, presumably from the Apsu, his realm, and mixed with the corpse by the Mother-goddess. When the mixture was ready the gods spat upon it and, with the task completed, the rejoicing gods conferred upon the goddess the title 'Mistress of the gods'. In an elaborate process of birth, the first human couples then came into being, their substance the god-clay mixture.

Once again there is a theme also known to other Babylonian myths. Slaughter of a god and utilization of his blood is found in *Enuma elish* (Tablet VI), and in the bilingual account already cited deities are killed. The Sumerian *Enki and Ninmah* may also have the same idea. Allusion to the clay is absent from *Enuma elish* and the bilingual account; it probably appears in another bilingual text from Babylon as the substance of creation, and in references in other texts.²² The gods participating in the creation of man vary from text to text.

Comparison with Genesis may also be made on this topic. God 'formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul' (2:7). Man's earthy constituency is emphasized by both Babylonian and Hebrew narratives, and his divine part equally. It is tempting to equate the breathing of Genesis with the spitting of the Atrahasis Epic, but they are very different actions. The 'breath of life' is peculiar to God and man in the Old Testament,²³ the spitting may have no more significance than preparation of the material for working. Yet we may wonder whether it was the life-giving act, finally preparing the material. No hint of the use of dead deity or any material part of a living one is found in Genesis.

²² A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* 65-66; *Theodicy* 258, 276-278, W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1960) 86-89.

²³ As T. C. Mitchell has demonstrated, *VT* 11 (1961) 177-187.

4. *The multiplication of mankind.* From the creation of man the Atrahasis Epic passes to the great increase in his number, with a short, and damaged, account of how he now laboured on earth. No other Babylonian text treats of this phase of human history, so this Epic may be placed alone beside Genesis. God commanded man to multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28), and as man multiplied, so did his sin. The narrative relating the increase of man and sin is Genesis 6:1-8, and in studies of this passage the Epic of Atrahasis has been mentioned as a 'parallel'.²⁴ The Atrahasis Epic recounts that:

‘There had not passed twelve hundred years,
The inhabited land had expanded, the people had multiplied,
The land was bellowing like a wild bull.
The god was disturbed by their clamour,
Enlil heard their din.
He said to the great gods,
“Grievous has grown the din of mankind,
Through their clamour I lose sleep. . .”’

To meet the problem Enlil sent a plague to decimate the human race, but this was terminated by the intervention of Enki, the god who had been responsible for creating man. He instructed his devotee, Atrahasis, that he should order the city elders to proclaim a cessation of worship of all the gods except the responsible plague-god, who might be persuaded thereby to lift his hand. The command was duly obeyed; the plague ceased; mankind recovered and began to multiply again. Enlil, disturbed by the increasing noise, instigated a drought. Enki gave the same instructions to Atrahasis and the visitation was ended. The next stage is obscure owing to damaged manuscripts; it is clear that there was another attack in the form of a prolonged dearth. This may have been stopped by Enki and Atrahasis, for the gods are next found planning a destruction, the Flood.

The Epic of Atrahasis reveals a motive on the part of the gods in sending the Flood. This is lacking from the Flood story contained within the Gilgamesh Epic—it was irrelevant there, the simple statement that the gods decided to send the Flood

²⁴ E. G. Kraeling, *JNES* 6 (1947) 193-195; A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*², University of Chicago Press (1949) 225-226.

being sufficient to the account of how Uta-napishtim (=Atrahasis) obtained immortality (Gilgamesh XI:14).²⁵

Genesis 6 states that: ' . . . men began to multiply on the face of the earth' (verse 1); 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . .' (verse 5); ' . . . The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them' (verse 13).

In the common analysis of the literary structure of Genesis the first four verses of chapter 6 are detached from the remainder of the chapter. The episode related is treated as an aetiology of the Nephilim and characterized as a pagan myth, its offensive details whittled down until it was just fit to be absorbed into the Hebrew sacred literature.²⁶ Many of the problems attached to these verses fall beyond this study; a few points do arise in the present context. If parallelism of scheme is allowed between Hebrew and Babylonian traditions of ante-diluvian history, then this section should be accepted as an integral part of the scheme; it presents the 'population explosion' theme not found elsewhere in the Hebrew account.

The sin of the promiscuity of the 'sons of God' cannot be explained directly from Babylonian texts, but some hint may be found of their nature. A theory recently propounded as to their identity involves Babylonian concepts, and is attractive: the 'sons of God' are not divine beings, but kings.²⁷ Support is found in application of the title 'son of God' to kings in various ancient texts.²⁸ The sin of the 'sons of God' was, therefore, 'the sin of polygamy, particularly as it came to expression in the harem . . .'.²⁹ Gilgamesh, heroic king of Uruk some time after the Flood, well exemplifies the type of activity described in Genesis 6:1 ff.³⁰

The sin of mankind as a whole was his evil conduct resulting in violence, according to Genesis. While an equation with the 'din' of the Atrahasis Epic may appear improbable, the basic

²⁵ A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic* 80; *ANET* 93.

²⁶ Cf. B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, SCM Press, London (1960) 49-57.

²⁷ M. G. Kline, *WTJ* 24 (1962) 187-204.

²⁸ It may be noted that an Akkadian god-list identifies several of the ante-diluvian rulers with Dumu-zi, Tammuz; *Cuneiform Texts* XXIV, pl. 19, K4338b; XXV, pl. 7, K7663+11035.

²⁹ M. G. Kline, *loc. cit.* 196.

³⁰ A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic* 30 (Tablet II.22-37); *ANET* 77-78.

idea of disturbing deity is surely common to both narratives as the provocation leading to the decision to send the Flood.³¹

The several attempts to quell man's noise in the Atrahasis Epic have no counterpart in Genesis. It has been suggested that there is a similarity between the one-hundred-and-twenty-year 'period of grace' in Genesis 6:3 and the plague, drought, dearth episode in Atrahasis.³² Certainly, the number 'an hundred and twenty' could have Babylonian undertones from the sexagesimal system, and the intervals between the visitations in the Epic are delimited by the expression 'not twelve hundred years had passed'. Therein a further theme linking this episode with the Flood sequence may exist.³³

5. *The Flood*. No Babylonian text provides so close a parallel to Genesis as does the Flood story of Gilgamesh XI. Considerable study has been devoted to the accounts in the two languages and to comparison of them. The work of Alexander Heidel is the most comprehensive, the commentary of Umberto Cassuto the most detailed.³⁴

In the Atrahasis Epic the Flood is the major topic; at the end the whole composition is apparently referred to as 'the Flood'. Since the major text of the Epic dates from the seventeenth century BC (see above, p. 4), it is thus about a millennium older than the texts of Gilgamesh XI which stem from Ashurbanipal's Library at Nineveh and from neo-Babylonian Babylon. Nevertheless the story is the same. That is not to say that every word is identical, nor even every incident, but the greater part is closely similar where both Epics are preserved. The differences are partly due to editorial redaction when the story was inserted into the Gilgamesh cycle, partly inexplicable with any certainty.

A notable fact is the portrait of the Babylonian Noah, Atrahasis. He is entitled 'servant' of Enki and was quite clearly a special devotee of that god. Indeed, it is possible to interpret his name as 'the exceedingly devout' as well as 'exceedingly wise', the common explanation, for the root *hss* has the sense of

³¹ J. J. Finkelstein, *JBL* 75 (1956) 329 n.7 sees an 'echo' of Atrahasis in Genesis 6.

³² A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic* 230-232; M. G. Kline, *loc. cit.* 597.

³³ The figure in Gn. 6:3 may denote man's life span, not a period of grace at all, so B. S. Childs, *op. cit.* 52-53; *cf.*, however, K. A. Kitchen, *loc. cit.* 6.

³⁴ A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* II, Magnes Press, Jerusalem (1964) 4-24; *cf.* G. Hilion, *Le Déluge dans la Bible et les Inscriptions akkadiennes et sumériennes*, Geuthner, Paris (1925).

devotion, respect, and care. This describes aptly the character of the hero portrayed in the Flood story, for it was not of his own wisdom that he saved himself, but by obedience to divine instructions. Moreover, the reason given by Enki for revealing the plan to exterminate humanity to one man has more weight when understood as 'I caused the exceedingly devout one to see dreams, he heard the decision of the gods' than as 'the exceedingly wise one' (Gilgamesh XI: 187; not preserved in the extant text of the Atrahasis Epic). His piety then appears clearly as the reason for his survival. In addition to his relationship to his god, he had authority to summon and instruct the city elders, pointing to his high rank, consonant with his representation as a king in the King List tradition, and as a priest in the Sumerian Deluge Tablet.³⁵ This supports the contention that it was for his piety he was saved from destruction, just as Noah was saved for his righteousness.³⁶

Other points of similarity are those already found in the Gilgamesh Flood story and require no new examination at present. The episode of the birds is not present in the Epic of Atrahasis, but it cannot be said definitely that it was never included because the only manuscript is broken at the appropriate point. Agreement between the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh narratives on so much of the story lends weight to the supposition that the incident was included.³⁷

After the Flood, Atrahasis made sacrifices to the gods who are depicted as sitting miserably in heaven without food or drink for its duration. The gods, already regretting their action, indulged in further recrimination. Enki made a speech similar to that in Gilgamesh XI which begins 'On the sinner lay his sin; on the transgressor lay his transgression' (line 180), but that illuminating line does not occur in the incomplete text of the Atrahasis Epic. Atrahasis' destiny is also unknown because of damage to the tablets. The gods so ordained society thereafter that there would be some control of the number of mankind.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE BABYLONIAN AND THE HEBREW ACCOUNTS COMPARED

I. *The scheme as a whole.* There can be no doubt that the con-

³⁵ Cf. J. J. Finkelstein, *JCS* 57 (1963) 48.

³⁶ A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic* 228; *contra* U. Cassuto, *op. cit.* 20.

³⁷ W. G. Lambert, *loc. cit.* 292, is noncommittal.

cept of a history of man from his creation to the Flood is similar both in Babylonian and in Hebrew. Any future consideration of possible origins of the Hebrew story must take this into account, and not treat Creation and Flood separately. Thus it is no longer legitimate to describe the Hebrew Flood story as 'borrowed' from a Babylonian 'original' without including its complementary Creation account.³⁸ The objection may be raised that exactly such a separation is made within Akkadian literature; the Flood story is given in Gilgamesh XI without its context. However, that poem itself makes the reason plain: Uta-napish-tim related the story of how he gained immortality, and for his purpose the Creation narrative was unnecessary. That it is there a case of literary borrowing cannot be doubted, but the intention is clear and the new context, the account related by the hero, is quite natural.

2. While the overall scheme, Creation—Rebellion—Flood, is identical, most of the detail is different; on a few points only there is agreement. A summary may help in considering inter-relationship.

a. *Man's constituency.* Both the Bible and some Babylonian Creation accounts depict man as created from 'the dust of the earth' or 'clay'. To this is added some divine component, 'breath' in Genesis, flesh and blood of a god, and divine spittle in Babylonia. This concept of clay and divine substance mixed is not exclusive to these two literatures. It is found in Egypt in certain traditions, and, further afield, in China.³⁹ Common ideas need not share a common source. The earthy concept may be placed in the category of a deduction from natural processes which could be made independently. The belief in a divine indwelling 'spark' seems to be common to so many faiths and cultures that this also need not be traced to a common origin.

b. *Divine rest.* In Babylonian tradition the creation of man relieved the gods of the need to work; they entered a new era of rest. In Genesis God rested after His creation was complete. The actions are very similar, the contexts are quite different. The Hebrew God needed not to labour for His sustenance, nor

³⁸ As, for example, A. Richardson, *Genesis I-XI*, SCM Press (1953) 97.

³⁹ See S. G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East*, Hodder & Stoughton, London (1964), and *La Naissance du Monde, Sources Orientales I*, Editions du Seuil, Paris (1959).

did He tire of His work. The Babylonian gods, on the other hand, were 'like a man', toiling and wearying, needing help in the business of keeping alive. Wholly different theologies underlie these two views. Emphasis is often laid on the word תָּשׁוּבָה and its Akkadian cognate *šapattu*.⁴⁰ Both words basically denote 'cessation, completion'. However, use of cognate terms does not carry with it identity of practice or of the origins of a practice. In fact, the Akkadian word denotes specifically the moon, the peak of the lunar cycle on the fifteenth day of the lunar month, and nothing else. Hebrew שָׁבָת is not used in that way, nor is it used solely of a week's end. An analogy is found in the usages of the cognates תְּהוֹמָתָם and Tiāmat. Thus only the idea of divine rest is really similar; no derived Sabbath existed in Babylonia. It may be asked, therefore, whether this similarity is strong enough and striking enough to indicate borrowing.

c. *Man's task*. Again it may be argued that cultivating and tending the earth is so common an occupation that the designation of this as the reason for man's existence could have arisen in two places independently. In fact Genesis does not express this so simply as man's purpose.

d. *Man's rebellion*. While the biblical Fall finds no counterpart in Babylonia, the provocation of deity leading to the Flood is comparable in general terms.

e. *The Flood*. Here is the section most similar in the two traditions: the Ark, its passengers, the birds, the grounding on a mountain, and the sacrifice are all basically shared.

3. *Did the Hebrews borrow from Babylon?* Neither an affirmative nor a negative reply to the question can be absolutely discounted in the light of present knowledge. Reconstructions of a process whereby Babylonian myths were borrowed by the Hebrews, having been transmitted by the Canaanites, and 'purged' of pagan elements⁴¹ remain imaginary. It has yet to be shown that any Canaanite material was absorbed into Hebrew sacred literature on such a scale or in such a way. Babylonian literature itself was known in Palestine at the time of the Israelite conquest,

⁴⁰ W. G. Lambert, *loc. cit.* 296f.

⁴¹ E.g. C. A. Simpson in *The Interpreter's Bible* I, Abingdon Press, Nashville (1952) 195, 445-450.

and so could have been incorporated directly. The argument that borrowing must have taken place during the latter part of the second millennium BC because so many Babylonian texts of that age have been found in Anatolia, Egypt, and the Levant,⁴² cannot carry much weight, being based on archaeological accident. The sites yielding the texts were either deserted or destroyed at that time, resulting in the burial of 'libraries' and archives intact.⁴³ Evidence does exist of not inconsiderable Babylonian scribal influence earlier (e.g. at Alalakh and Byblos).⁴⁴

However, it has yet to be shown that there was borrowing, even indirectly. Differences between the Babylonian and the Hebrew traditions can be found in factual details of the Flood narrative (form of the Ark; duration of the Flood, the identity of the birds and their dispatch) and are most obvious in the ethical and religious concepts of the whole of each composition.⁴⁵ All who suspect or suggest borrowing by the Hebrews are compelled to admit large-scale revision, alteration, and re-interpretation in a fashion which cannot be substantiated for any other composition from the Ancient Near East or in any other Hebrew writing. If there was borrowing then it can have extended only as far as the 'historical' framework, and not included intention or interpretation. The fact that the closest similarities lie in the flood stories is instructive. For both Babylonians and Hebrews the Flood marked the end of an age. Mankind could trace itself back to that time; what happened before it was largely unknown. The Hebrews explicitly traced their origins back to Noah, and, we may suppose, assumed that the account of the Flood and all that went before derived from him. Late Babylonian ages supposed that tablets containing information about the ante-diluvian world were buried at Sippar before the Flood and disinterred afterwards.⁴⁶ The two accounts undoubtedly describe the same Flood, the two schemes

⁴² Is W. G. Lambert, *loc. cit.* 299-300.

⁴³ This is true of almost every large collection of literary texts in cuneiform, not only Amarna, Ugarit, Bogazköy at this period, but also Ur and Nippur earlier, Assur, Nineveh, Nimrud, and Sultantepe at the end of the Assyrian Empire, Babylon and Uruk even later; cf. W. G. Lambert, *Revue d'Assyriologie* 53 (1959) 123.

⁴⁴ D. J. Wiseman *Syria* 39 (1962) 181-184 for Alalakh; W. F. Albright, *BASOR* 163 (1961) 45 for Byblos.

⁴⁵ Most recently stated by K. A. Kitchen, *loc. cit.* 7.

⁴⁶ Berossus; A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic* 117.

relate the same sequence of events. If judgment is to be passed as to the priority of one tradition over the other, Genesis inevitably wins for its probability in terms of meteorology, geophysics, and timing alone. In creation its account is admired for its simplicity and grandeur, its concept of man accords well with observable facts. In that the patriarch Abraham lived in Babylonia, it could be said that the stories were borrowed from there, but not that they were borrowed from any text now known to us. Granted that the Flood took place, knowledge of it must have survived to form the available accounts; while the Babylonians could only conceive of the event in their own polytheistic language, the Hebrews, or their ancestors, understood the action of God in it. Who can say it was not so?

Careful comparison of ancient texts and literary methods is the only way to the understanding of the early chapters of Genesis. Discovery of new material requires re-assessment of former conclusions; so the Epic of Atrahasis adds to knowledge of parallel Babylonian traditions, and of their literary form. All speculation apart, it underlines the uniqueness of the Hebrew *primaeval* history in the form in which it now exists.