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Two Assyro-Babylonian Parallels to Dan. v. 5 ff.

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EVERY noteworthy treatise on the book of Daniel has discussed the origin of the tradition regarding the mysterious writing on the wall, which, according to Dan. 5, appeared to Belshazzar, in the opinion of this author the last king of Babylon. In my own *Commentary on Daniel* (1899) I endeavored, of course without any idea of upholding the historical authority of Daniel, to bring forward every point which might demonstrate the existence of historical or at least original Babylonian elements as the basis of the Daniel legends. Thus, in chapter 5, the name Belshazzar, found only in Daniel in the O.T., was shown to be a true Babylonian survival,¹ because this name has been found in the cuneiform documents as that of the son of Nabonidus, the last native king of Babylon. Furthermore, the statement in Daniel, that Belshazzar died in Babylon when the city fell, is evidently a distortion of the fact that Nabonidus's son, who was in command of the native army, met his death in conflict with the invading Persian forces. The accounts of Herodotus and Xenophon also agree with the statement in Dan. 5 that a feast actually took place on the eve of the capture of Babylon. According to Herod. i, 191, Babylon was taken while the besieged were enjoying a festival, and Xenophon likewise (*Cyrop.* v. 5¹⁵) remarks that Cyrus, before he attacked the city, heard that a festival was going on in Babylon. As already pointed out in my commentary (pp. 102 ff.), these three statements of the Maccabæan author of Daniel may be looked upon as more or less distorted echoes of genuine Babylonian tradition.

It may now be shown also, I think, that the portent of the mysterious writing itself was probably not, as many expositors have imagined, a mere invention, but a real Babylonian survival in Daniel.

¹ The Babylonian form of the name is *Bêl-sar-uçur*, 'Bel protect the king' (Prince, *Daniel*, pp. 35 ff.).

This point, so far as I am aware, has not been treated satisfactorily by previous commentators.

In Dan. 5⁵ we read : “ In that same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand and wrote opposite the candelabra on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, and the king saw the surface of the hand which wrote.” The meaning of this text is not very clear. The fingers are said to have come forth נפקו, so that we may conclude the author’s idea to have been that they were generally visible. He adds with special emphasis ומלכא חוזה פס ידא דִּי כתבה, “ and the king saw the surface (*i.e.*, the outline פס ידא) of the hand which wrote,” thereby implying, either that the outline of the hand was *not* visible to the rest of the assembly, or simply, that the king, for whom the warning was personally intended, saw the portent with startling distinctness. The latter supposition seems the more likely, and we may infer therefrom that the courtiers as well as the king saw the פס ידא. Of course, the writing which the hand left must have been visible to others besides the king, as is clear from 5⁸ : “ Then came in all the king’s wise men, but they were not able to read the writing, nor to make known its interpretation to the king.” It remained then for Daniel, the skilled seer, to explain the significance of the portentous inscription.

I desire in this paper to call attention to two striking parallels to this biblical tale in the Assyro-Babylonian literature, more than two thousand years apart from one another. One of these, and perhaps the more striking of the two, is mentioned in the Annals of the Assyrian king Ašurbânipal (668–626 B.C.), while the other dates from the reign of the ancient Sumerian Babylonian monarch Gudea (*ca.* 3000 B.C.). As will be seen from the following exposition, both are records of visions in which the dreamer sees a divine writing which conveys to him, in the one case, an important oracle ; and in the other instance, instructions from his god.

The Ašurbânipal inscription reads as follows :

Ina ùmešûma ištêni šabrû ina šat² mâši utulma inaṭṭal šuttu ; umma ina ʔli kigalli ʔu Sin šaṭirma ; mâ : “ ša itti Ašur-bân-apli šar mâ Aššur iqpuḍu limuttu, eppušu ġilûtum, mâtu limnu ašarrağšunûti ; ina paṭri parzilli xanṭi, miğit ištâti, xušaxxu, lipit Gira uqattâ naṣṣatsun.” Annâte ašmêma ; atkil ana amât ʔu Sin bêlîia.

² *Šat* rather than *šad* (cf. *šad urri*, ‘daybreak’) is a construct state of *šattu*, ‘duration of time, hour,’ and is used here exactly like *mudde* in Egyptian Arabic; *fī muddet el-leyl*, ‘during the night.’

“On that same day a certain scribe during the night fell asleep and saw a vision; namely, on the surface (*i.e.*, the crescent) of the god Sin it stood written, thus: ‘whosoever hath planned evil against Ašur-bâni-pal, the king of the land of Assyria, whosoever enacteth hostility against him, to them will I give a baleful death; by the swift dagger of iron, by casting into the fire,³ by famine, by the destruction of the god Gira will I cut off their lives.’ These things I heard; I trusted in the word of the god Sin, my lord” (Ašurb., *Annals*, iii. 118–127).

The correct understanding of this passage depends wholly on the interpretation of the words *ina êli kigalli*³ *Sin*, which I render ‘on the surface of the god Sin.’ *Kigallu*, which is a Sumerian loanword in Assyrian, means primarily ‘the great place’ (*KI.GAL.*), and is applied as an indeterminate but respectful word for an important ‘surface’ or ‘place’ of any sort, thus, in the *Descent of Istar to Hades*, obv. 24, 48, it is used for ‘the lower world’; cf. *Nin-ki-gal* ‘Lady of Hades.’ In Nbk. viii. 60 also, the great Nebuchadrezzar is made to say concerning the laying of foundations: “I laid them, *ina irat kigallu*, on the very bosom of Hades;” *viz.*, the foundations were placed as deeply as possible. *Kigallu* is also explained in II. R. 44, nr. 7, 74–75, by the Semitic word *bêrûtu* ‘a deep place.’ This is probably a meaning secondary to the idea ‘Hades.’ *KI.GAL.* has the phonetic value *su-ur* given in II. R. 44, nr. 7, 74–75, but also = Semitic *ki-gal-la*, IV. R. 13, 11 b, so that the Assyrian phonetic rendering in our Ašurbânipal text has full justification. *Kigallu* occurs in Assyrian in Sarg. Cyl. 36, meaning ‘a waste (with the adj. *šuxrubtu*) territory’ or ‘surface of ground,’ and in Senn. Const. 83 we find this sentence: “I made its (the palace dwelling-room’s) *kigallu* of precious stones.” In this passage *kigallu* would seem to mean some special part of the palace, possibly the royal bed-chamber. In Senn. Kuy. 4, 5, we read that certain images “stood firmly each on or in its own *kigallu*”; *ina kigalli ramnišunu šâqîš nanzuzû*; possibly this denotes ‘shrine,’ as the translation that each image stood on its own surface or basis would be unsatisfactory, such an idea being self-evident. In short, I assume that *kigallu* means ‘place of any sort’ adapted to the subject which is under discussion. It is a word of much less scope than *ašru* ‘place, locality,’ and apparently, being a Sumerian loanword, was treated as a more solemn expression.

³ *Miqit išâti*, ‘casting into the fire,’ suggests an interesting parallel with the fate of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Dan. 3. Cf. in Jer. 29²² the account of the roasting of Zedekiah and Ahab by the king of Babylon (Prince, *Dan.* p. 79).

A flood of light is shed on our passage in the annals of Ašurbânipal by the variant to the regular text which, instead of reading *ina êli kigalli* ^{itu} *Sin šaširma*, gives the highly significant rendering : ^{itu} *Nabû dupšar gimri šipir ilûtîšu ušuzma*⁴ *istanasâ malțaru kigalli* ^{itu} *Sin*, "Nebo, the universal tablet writer (which is) the art of his godhead, stood reading aloud the inscription of the surface (or place) of the god Sin." In other words, according to this version, the sleeping scribe saw Nebo standing and reading aloud to him (*i.e.*, interpreting to him) the words of the oracle written on the characteristic place of Sin, the moon-god ; *viz.*, on that part of the moon which was always the emblem of Sin, *i.e.*, the crescent.

Jensen's rendering of *ina êli kigalli* ^{itu} *Sin* by "*auf der Scheibe(?) des Mondes*," "on the disc of the moon" (followed by Jastrow, *Religion*, p. 350), is impossible, because the moon-god is never represented emblematically otherwise than by the crescent. The disc or circle (for a disc must always be circular), with four points and four streams, is the emblem of Šamaš, the sun-god, just as the star is the sign of the goddess Ištar.⁵ The regular word for crescent was *agû*, which denotes the crescent-crown of Sin with two horns ; cf. III. R. 5, no. iii. 40 : *Sin ina namurišu agâ apir*, "when Sin appears attired in the *agû*," or "crescent crown." In K. 3567 obv. 14-18 the waxing of the moon-god from the crescent new moon (*agû*) to the full moon is mentioned. There can be little doubt that the word *kigallu* meant to Ašurbânipal's scribe 'the place of the moon-god' *par excellence*. The last words of the text of the Annals given above make it perfectly clear that the oracle emanated from Sin ; "I heard these things ; I trusted to the word of the god Sin, my lord." Sin, as the illuminator *Nannâru*, was essentially the god of wisdom, although his rôle was not so important as that of many other deities. Thus, Šamaš, the more popular sun-god, was a more frequent patron of oracles (see *s.v. purussû*, Delitzsch, *Hdwb.* pp. 543-544), but Sin is also called *bêl purussê*, 'the lord of oracles.' His name in Sumerian was (*Dingir*) *En-zu-na*, 'the lord of wisdom,' probably a rebus for *Zu-en-na* ; cf. *zu-ab* for *ab-zu*.

The divinity *Gira* (read *Ura* by Pinches in *Bab. Rec.* i. 208) is identical with *Dibbara*, 'destruction' (cf. Scheil's *Recueil de Travaux*, xix. no. 3, and Jensen, *Cosm.* pp. 145 ; 480 ; 483 ; 487).

⁴ *Ušuzma* is apparently a shortened form of *ušezišma* from *našûzu*, 'to stand.'

⁵ Thus, *Dilbat* = *nabû*, 'tell, announce' (II R. 7, 37, *g, h*), was the Babylonian name of Ištar as the morning-star (Prince, *Dan.* p. 226). Dr. W. Hayes Ward, whose authority on Babylonian emblems is unquestioned, confirms me in this view.

Here then we have an instance of a vision, in which the divine decree is given, not as in Daniel to the king himself, but to a professional seer by means of mysterious writing, not indeed on the wall or on any part of the temple (as Tiele thought, *Gesch.* p. 379, n. 1), but on the crescent of the moon. The god Nebo, the patron of all letters, most appropriately acts, according to one version, as the interpreter, reading the inscription aloud. The vision in the Assyrian parallel is one favorable to the king while the portent in Daniel is, of course, highly unfavorable.

Another curious instance of a dream wherein divine instructions are given by means of writing is seen in Price's text of the Gudea A Cylinder (pt. 1, 1899, pp. 7 ff.). The text of the passage, which is in the non-Semitic Sumerian, is transliterated and translated by Thureau-Dangin in *ZA.* xvi. pp. 344-362. I give the passage as follows, with some emendations of the rendering of Thureau-Dangin.

- Col. iv. 13. *Nin-kur-kur-ra . . . -ka mu-ud-du ma(?) -mú-da*
The Queen of Lands my . . . appeared (lit. came forth) in a vision.
14. *Šd-ma-mú-da-ka gal-lá-ám an-gim ri-ba-ni*
In the midst of my dream there was a man shining like the heaven;
15. *Ki-gim ri-ba-ni*
Shining like the earth.
16. *A-ge sag-gá-ni-šú dingir-ra-ám*
(By) the crown of his head he was a god.
17. *A-ni-šú (dingir) Im-gi(g)-(xu)-dam*
At his side was the divine bird Im-gi, the night wind.
18. *Sig (= sib)-ba-ni-a-šú a-ma-ru-kam*
Beneath him there was a hurricane (?)
19. *zi(d)-da gub-na ug ni-nd-nd*
On his right hand and on his left a storm lay couched.
20. *E-a-ni rú-da ma-an-gú(ka)*
He commanded me to make his house.
21. *Šd(g)-gá-ni nu-mu-zu*
Himself I did not recognize.
22. *Babbar ki-šar-ra ma-ta-ê*
The luminary from the earth went forth.
23. *Sal-ám a-ba-me-a-nu a-ba-me-a-ni*
There was a woman. Who was she not? Who was she?
24. (illegible.)
25. *Gi-dub-ba azag-gi-a šu im-mi-dú*
A pure pen (stylus) she held in her hand.
26. *Dub mul-an-dug-ga im-mi-gál*
The tablet of the good star of heaven she bore.

Col. v. 1. *Ad-im-tá-gi-gi*

She took counsel with herself.

2. *Min-kam ur-sag-gá-dm*

A second hero there was.

3. *Á-mu (giš)-li-um zágin šu im-mi-dú*

Beside me a tablet of lapis lazuli he held in his hand.

4. *É-a (giš)-xar-bi im-gá-gá.*

The temple's plan he giveth (me).

As this is a unilingual Sumerian inscription I have touched upon its most salient grammatical points as being of interest to the student of early Babylonian literature.

Col. iv. 13. *Nin-kur-kur-ra* is *Niná* whom the *patesi* Gudéa in col. v. 11 ff. calls *ama-ni*, 'his mother.' *Mu-ud-du* seems to mean 'she comes forth'; it might be read *mu-é*, as in col. iv. 22 *ma-ta-é*. *Ma-mú* is *MA.SAR*. *SAR* = *mú*, V R. 21, 9 e. Cf. *Ma-mú-gim*, 'like a vision,' IV R. 24, 47; *ma-mú-da-ta*, 'in a dream,' with conflation of the postpositions; *da* + *ta* both = 'in,' IV R. 22, 39 b.

Col. iv. 14. *Sá* = *libbu*, 'midst,' and the ending *-ka* = *ma*, with vocalic harmonization for the usual *-mu*, 'my'; for the interchange of nasal and palatal sounds in Sumerian, cf. *gal-mal*, 'great,' *gir-ner*, 'foot,' and others, *ASKT.* p. 134. In *gal-lá-ám* the *lá* is *status prolong.*; not *gi* with Thureau-Dangin. *Am* is the phonetic rendering of *A-AN*, the preterite of the verb 'to be'; cf. *me* in col. iv. 23. This *-ám* ending appears four times in 14, 16; 17, *dam*; 18, *kam*; undoubtedly for poetical assonance; cf. *me* in col. iv. 23. *Ri-ba-ni* has *ri* with postpositive conjugation; *ri* = *šarúru* in II R. 48, 24 c. 'shining,' not 'great' with Thureau-Dangin.

Col. iv. 16. *A-ge* 'crown' original of the Semitic form *agú*, the crescent-crown of Sin. The usual ideogram is *MIR*, Sb. 1, ii. 15; *MIR* = *aga* = *agú*.

Col. iv. 17. *Im-gi(g)* means the night wind, represented as a bird (see the postpositive determinative *-xu* which was probably not pronounced). The ending *-dam* seems to contain the local infix *-da* + the verb *-ám* (*A-AN*), *i.e.*, 'he was in it' or 'there.' Probably *gi(g)* was read *gid* here, as in line 18 *sig-ba* was probably *sib-ba* with assimilation of the final root-consonant.⁶ Winds were naturally regarded as birds, an idea which no doubt arose from wind-driven clouds.⁷

⁶ This phenomenon of the alteration of consonants is seen also in Finnish; cf. *vesi*, 'water,' but gen. *veden* from *vete*; *läpi*, 'a hole,' gen. *läven*; *reki*, 'a sledge,' gen. *reen*, etc. (Eliot's *Finnish Grammar*, pp. 32 ff.).

⁷ See also Jastrow, *Religion*, p. 537.

Col. iv. 18. *Sig-ba* was probably read *sib-ba* as *gig-dam* = *gid-dam* in line 17. *Sib-ba-ni* would be in Assyrian *ina šaplīšu* 'beneath him'; cf. IV R. 3, 3 a, *sig nim* = *ēliš u šaplīs* 'above and below.' Thureau-Dangin translates 'at his feet,' but this would be *gir-ra-ni-šú*. *A-ma-ru-kam*, which I render 'there was a hurricane,' must be a variant of *im-mir-ra* = *mēxú* 'storm'; cf. V. 11, 46 e; *ASKT.* 76, 39.

Col. iv. 19. *Ug* probably does not mean 'a lion' (Thureau-Dangin), but *úmu* 'a storm'; cf. Sb. 13; IV R. 5, 29 ff., where *ud-gal* = *úmu rabbutum*. In Sb. 81, *udgallum* = *ugallum*; cf. also *Creation* iii. 32 and V R. 33 col. iv. 52. The sign *ug* must be a phonetic variant here of this *ud* = *úmu*, root 𒍪. *Ug* = *šarru*, II R. 27, 5 a, but this can have no bearing on our passage. *Ná-ná* means *rabáçu* 'lie down,' II R. 36, 24-5 ab.

Col. iv. 21. *Šá-ga-ni* 'his heart,' i.e., 'himself.' In *nu-mu-zu* we have the 1 p. prefix in *mu*.

Col. iv. 22. *Ki-šar-ra* is the familiar 'host of earth' seen in the Creation Tablet. It means simply 'earth,' and indicates that the luminary or star rose *from the earth* as it seemed to them.

Col. iv. 23. *A-ba-me-a-nu* may be analyzed as follows: *aba* 'who?'; *me* is the verb 'to be' (see above); *a* is *status prolong.*; *nu* = the negation. In *a-ba-me-a-ni*, the *-ni* is suffix 3 p.

Col. iv. 25. *Gi-dub-ba*, lit. 'the reed of the tablet,' i.e., the stylus. In *im-mi-du*, cf. *gab* = *du* II R. 25, 36 e.

Col. iv. 26. "She bore a propitious tablet." *Im-mi-gál*; *IK* = *našú* 'lift, carry,' II R. 17, 18 a.

Col. v. 1. *Ad* in *ad-im-tá-gi-gi* means *milku* 'counsel,' perhaps a secondary idea from Sb. 93 *ad* = *abu* 'father,' hence 'counsellor.' Cf. *ad-ba-ni-ib-gi-gi* = *imtalikma*, IV R. 5, 57 a. *Tá* must be the correct reading here for the reflexive infix. This sign is doubtful in the text.

Col. v. 2. *Min-kam*. For *min* 'two,' cf. Lehmann's *Šamašsum-ukîn*, pp. 178 ff. for the Sumerian numerals.

Col. v. 3. I read this line quite differently from Thureau-Dangin's version: *á-mu* 'at my side.' Instead of the untranslatable compound *á-mu-gur*, which the text seems to present, I read (*giš*)⁷ the det. for *li-um*; cf. K. 4378 i. 2 (*giš*)-*lu-xu-si-um* = *liu* 'a tablet.' *Zágin* = *ZA-KUR* occurs rarely without the determinative *aban* 'stone.' Here it might simply mean *ébbu*, II R. 24, 47 a, or *éllu*, IV R. 18, 25 a, 'shining' or 'pure.' *ZA-KUR* also means *uknú* 'lapis lazuli,' however, and as one would expect to find mention of the material of the tablet in our passage, I see no reason to reject Thureau-Dangin's reading.

Col. v. 4. (*Giš*)-*xar-bi* 'its plan.' (*Giš*)-*xar* = *uṣurtum* 'any defined limit,' *i.e.*, 'a plan of a building,' V R. 11, 17 e, IV R. 21, 6 a. Note the construction here, "the temple its plan," instead of the usual (*giš*)-*xar e-a-kit* with the *nota genitivi*. *Im-gá-gá* 'he giveth me' with the present indicated by reduplication; cf. II R. 11, 25 c, *išarraq*. The prefix *im-* in *im-gá-gá* denotes the 1 p. element.

Dreams played a most important rôle in the ancient life of Babylonia and Assyria. In the Gilgameš Epic they were the regular means of communication between the gods and men, and appear as a universally accepted form of divine advice. Ašurbânipal was especially favored by the gods in the matter of dreams. He states for example that the goddess Ištar of Arbela appeared in a dream to his troops, apparently to his entire army(!) while on an Elamitic campaign, and said to them: "I go before Ašurbânipal." On hearing these encouraging words, the soldiers, who up to that time had feared to cross the stream Idide, at once proceeded successfully on their march (*Annals*, v, 97-102). Ašurbânipal also records that Gûgu (Gyges), king of Lydia, saw the Assyrian god Ašur in a dream, and was divinely advised: "Seize the feet of Ašurbânipal, the king of Assyria, and by his name conquer thine enemies." After Gyges had obeyed the god's advice, he was at once successful against the Indo-European Cimmerians, who at that period had begun to invest Asia Minor. It was apparently a matter of little moment by whom a dream or vision was seen. The gods might reveal themselves to a professional seer, or to the person, usually a monarch, for whom their admonition was especially intended, or to an entire army, as in the case just cited.

It is evident from the two inscriptions translated in this paper that a message might be delivered in dreams by the Assyro-Babylonian gods not only orally, but by means of *writing*. There is really only one point of deviation between the Daniel tale and these Assyro-Babylonian records of writing being seen in visions, *viz.*, the implication in Daniel that the writing was seen by the observers in a waking state, *i.e.*, that it did not appear as a vision. The number of people who saw the portent of Dan. 5 is quite unimportant, as we have already noticed that an entire army received the admonition of the goddess Ištar of Arbela.

In view then of the striking similarity of the story of Daniel with Ašurbânipal's record of the moon-god's mysterious writing, and in view of Gudea's inscription confirming the delivery of divine dream-communications *in writing*, it seems probable that in the narrative

of Dan. 5 we have a later distortion of an original Babylonian tale. It is possible that the author of Daniel knew a story, according to which the last king of Babylon was vouchsafed a vision *in writing* of his impending downfall. In the course of centuries this story must have been altered into a narrative of an event which took place in "waking" life, as we have it in Daniel. The Maccabæan biblical author then no doubt changed the account according to his theology and incorporated it into his work as a tale bearing an instructive moral for Antiochus Epiphanes, against whose persecutions the entire book of Daniel was directed.