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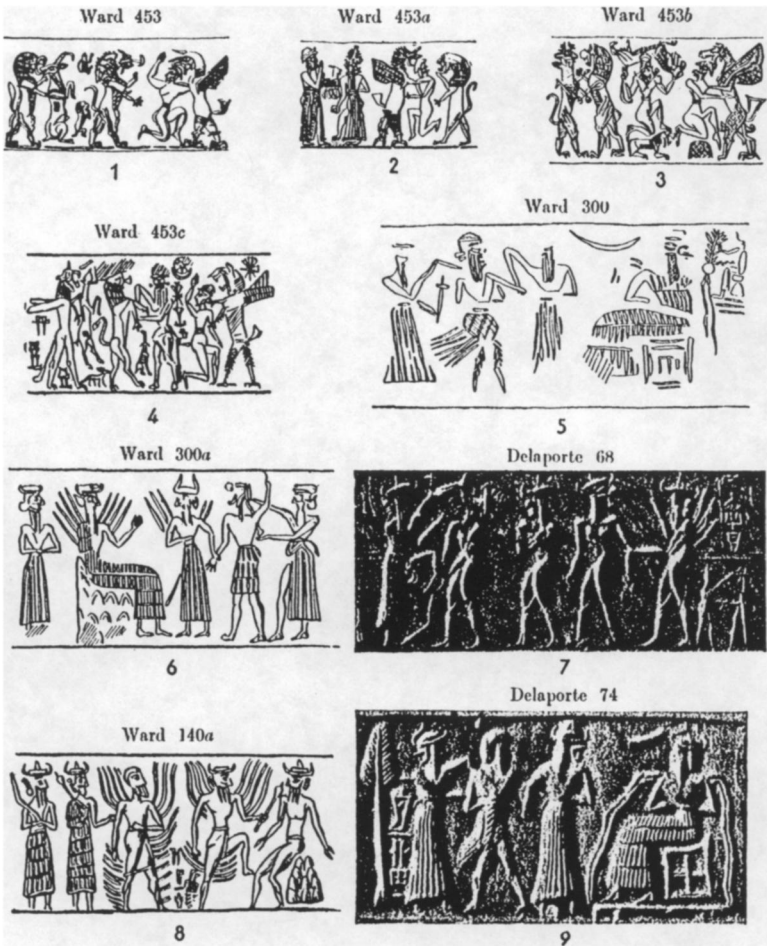


FIG.

1. Two demons figured as fantastic lions attacking a man.
2. Winged lion (as demon) consuming a man.
3. Winged panther demon attacking a man. Enkidu in combat with a lion.
4. Panther demon attacking a man, also attacking an animal. Enkidu in contact with a lion.
5. Bird devil brought before a deity.
6. A devil brought before the Sun-god.
7. Devils captured or slain by Sun-god.
8. Devil smitten by Sun-god.
9. Bird devil, captured and brought before Heaven-god.

# **Babylonian and Hebrew Demonology with reference to the supposed borrowing of Persian Dualism in Judaism and Christianity**

*Lecture delivered for Professor A. B. Cook in the University of  
Cambridge*

BY S. LANGDON

(PLATE I)

**D**UALISM is a term introduced into modern theology by the Englishman, Thomas Hyde, in 1700, and was first used to describe the fundamental principle of Persian Zoroastrism, namely the independent existence of good and evil. Ormazd the good god and Ahriman the evil god in the theology of the Persians represent an absolute dualism. For them Ahriman, corresponding to Satan of Judaism and Christianity, is entirely independent of the creator god. Good and evil, God and the Devil, are primeval supreme powers. Now I wish to trace the history of Satan or the Devil in Christianity back through Judaism, Hebrew, and Babylonian religion to its origin among the Sumerians. I shall endeavour to prove this Persian dualism, which admits that God did not create the Devil, to be totally foreign to Sumerian, Babylonian, and Hebrew speculation; and I shall then briefly examine the evidence on which modern scholars admit dualism to have been held by the Jews of the Apocalyptic period and by early Christianity as set forth in the New Testament. It is my conviction that Persian religion never had any influence upon Judaism or early Christianity. Satan, the Devil (*diabolus*), is traceable directly to Babylonian theology; there he is the creation of the gods.

Dualism in this ethical sense has no relation to dualism in metaphysics. After the time of Thomas Hyde the word was almost immediately transferred to philosophy, to the problem of mind and things. With philosophical dualism or

the independent existence of mind and matter, body and soul, the problem of God and Satan has no relation at all. Fichte said, however, that anyone who believes in philosophical dualism, as, for example Decartes did, is no philosopher. It may be said with equal German acidity that anyone who believes in ethical dualism or that God did not create the Devil is no theologian.

Before discussing Babylonian and Hebrew theology concerning the demons and devils it is necessary to point out a fact which seems to have been entirely overlooked or, at least, obscurely defined, in the history of theology. It is what may be defined as "cosmological dualism". The Babylonian *Epic of Creation* states definitely that in the beginning there was nothing but watery chaos, a mingled mass of bitter and fresh water, ruled over by the female dragon Tiamat. This she-dragon Tiamat, the Tehôm of the Hebrew account, is of Semitic origin. The version of creation in Genesis, borrowing from the late Babylonian myth, assumes a primeval chaos. Tohu and Bohu was the earth and darkness was on the face of Tehôm. But the late Hebrew author saw the difficulty of assuming a primeval water from which all things descended, gods and the universe; in Babylonia the gods themselves descended from the primal element, water; finally a terrific combat between the Sun-god and primeval darkness ended in the slaughter of the she-dragon with her twelve male dragons. That assumes a cosmological dualism. It admits that the gods created heaven and earth from the substance of chaos or water; it admits the original independent origin of the dragon of chaos. The Hebrew writer clearly saw this difficulty; he was a monotheist and writes that El had himself created this primeval matter.

As I have said all this is late Semitic speculation. The real origin of the myth is much older. The Sumerians also assumed that water is the first principle and made no further effort to explain it. This was the primeval chaos, over which presided the dragon *Mušhuššû*. Many representations of this serpent

dragon, which in the original Sumerian myth took the place of Tiamat in the later Semitic versions, are available. The most suggestive monument is a seal in the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> Here the creator Sun-god with lightning, thunderbolts, quiver and arrows, or in other designs with sword, smites the fleeing dragon. This older Sumerian form of the primeval combat between good and evil is the one which the Hebrew poets knew as referred to in the Book of Job, xxvi, 13, "His hand pierced the fleeing serpent."

Babylonian representations of the combat between the creator god and the primeval dragon never refer to the late Babylonian she-dragon Tiamat at all. In the various designs of the dragons in combat with the Sun-god,<sup>2</sup> Tiamat does not appear, but either Mušhuššû or one of the twelve fantastic monsters who opposed the gods. The real Hebrew speculation or, rather, Sumerian legends, in these matters was preserved only in their poets, and there they borrowed from early, not late, Babylonian sources. The reference to Rahab and the fleeing serpent in Job is based upon the original Sumerian legend.

The ancient Sumerian Mušhuššû appears in Hebrew mythology as Leviathan, coiling serpent of the sea. In late Apocalyptic literature a belief arose in a final combat between God and Satan, between good and evil. In some of these writers the dragon of chaos actually becomes the Devil or the enemy of god and oppressor of God's people, who will be slain in the last combat. This is a complete misuse of the ancient role of Mušhuššû or Leviathan. We shall see shortly that Satan, the Devil, is of totally different origin and had no connection with the ancient cosmological dualist myth.

A late visionary poet whose apocalypse is preserved in our

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Ward, *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, No. 579, reproduced and discussed in the writer's *Semitic Mythology*, p. 131. Mušhuššû was identified with Hydra, *Semitic Mythology*, p. 278. In my edition of the *Epic of Creation*, p. 87, n. 9, I was in doubt on this point. Bašmu, *ibid.*, 86, n. 8, cannot be Hydra.

<sup>2</sup> *Semitic Mythology*, pp. 278-284.

text of Isaiah describes this future victory of God over Satan in the following lines :—

“ In that day will Yāv take vengeance,  
 With his sword, harsh, mighty and powerful,  
 Upon Leviathan, the fleeing serpent,  
 And upon Leviathan, the coiled serpent,  
 And will slay the dragon which is in the sea.”

The original Sumerian legend of a combat between Ninurta, god of war, the victorious light of the spring sun, with Mušhuššû and the dragons of chaos survives in the Hebrew Psalms :—

“ Thou hast rent asunder the sea by thy power.  
 Thou hast broken the heads of the dragons on the waters.  
 Thou hast smitten the head of Leviathan.”

Babylonians and Hebrews believed that creation of an ordered world was made possible only by the triumph of the creator god over the chief dragon of watery chaos ; the Hebrews, not independently, but only in complete acceptance of Sumero-Babylonian views. There is no trace in Hebrew that the gods descended from this primeval matter. They knew, however, the myth of how the gods had sent their champion to slay the monster, which wished to brood in peace over the primeval abyss. There is here, nevertheless, a definite theory that good and evil exist together in the substance from which all things descended. It resulted in a *cosmological dualism*, which in Babylonia never had the slightest connection with devils and other authors of all human woe. And throughout the Hebrew scriptures this myth of the battle of Yāv or Elohim, their god, with Leviathan and the other dragons of chaos is preserved by the poets. Only in very late times was this incarnation of cosmological disorder ever confused with Satan or the incarnation of ethical wickedness.

These views must be held clearly in mind ; the history of the devils, who finally emerged in the figure of Satan, lord of wickedness and the material world, is an entirely different

sphere of speculation and mythology. Here we come to the ethical aspect of the matter and to what has been defined (wrongly, I hope to prove) as *ethical dualism*. Demons and evil spirits who destroy men's happiness are an aspect of every national religion of antiquity. Demons of a primitive kind among the Canaanites and Hebrews are well known, but most of the demons in Hebrew religion are derived both in name and character from Babylonia. Now the demons and devils of Babylonia are entirely Sumerian, and at a very early period they no longer preserve any primitive characteristics. They are fitted into a very definite system of theology; these are the demons which had most influence upon Hebrew demonology, and it is to them and not to the primitive demons of Canaanitish and Hebrew religion that the history of Satan-Diabolus must be traced.

In Sumer and Babylonia the devils are the sons of the Heaven-god. In abstract terms the personifications of human woes and sorrows are created by the gods themselves. The lords of sin and misery are an inherent part of divine providence; sin and misery exist because it is the purpose of the gods to shew their power over the demons. It is entirely obvious from the Babylonian and Sumerian texts that the devils are free agents, free to exercise their nefarious attacks upon man; the gods have no control over the will of Satan, although he is their own creation.

Now, before I describe Babylonian and Hebrew demons, an historical fact should be emphasized. Sumerian religion was known in Phœnicia, Syria, and Canaan before 2000 B.C., and cults of Sumerian deities were firmly established in Canaan before the final occupation by the Hebrews. Ninurta, Sumerian god of war, of the spring sun and "lord of swine", had a temple near Jerusalem before the Hebrew occupation, and another at Byblus in northern Phœnicia. The cult of Tammuz is known to have been firmly established at Byblos, whence spread the cult of Adonis to Greek lands at an early date. Jerusalem itself was an ancient seat of sun-worship

which persisted throughout Hebrew history. At Beth-Shan, an ancient Canaanite city north of Jerusalem, the serpent cult of the Babylonian god Shahan has been found in abundance. Here, also, was found clear evidence of the worship of the Babylonian Ishtar. "The house of *Šahan*" in Canaan was obviously a seat of the Babylonian Ishtar cult. The Philistines fastened the body of Saul to the walls of Beth-Shan and placed his armour in the temple of Astarte or Ishtar there.

When the Hebrews entered Canaan, that was no longer a land of primitive hunters, wandering Bedouin with primitive



customs. The parallel is the entry of Anglo-Saxons into Roman Britain. When the Hebrew people entered Canaan the Sumerian demonology was already firmly established among the Canaanites, and if they really understood Sumerian theology there can be no question whatsoever about dualism there.

In the assertion of statements so radical and far-reaching as these you naturally press for facts. This hitherto unpublished seal in the Ashmolean Museum shews one of the



representations of the seven devils<sup>1</sup>; I refer now to the second register; there are eight animal-headed demons on this monument. The corresponding bronze plaque, *Catalogue de Clercq*, ii, pl. xxxiv (*Sem. Myth.*, fig. 44) has seven devils, viz., panther, lion, dog, sheep, wild ram, vulture, and serpent. They are represented as ferocious beasts in mythology, to describe their hostile nature. The demons are usually called the wicked *udug* or *utukku*, a word which means "ghost". A ghost demon may be both good and bad. They are also called *gigim* or *eṭimmu*, also a word for "ghost". The word *utukku* does not appear in Hebrew, but *eṭimmu* passed into late Hebrew as *ṭimî*.

A Sumerian text describes the seven devils as follows:—

"They are rushing storms, evil gods.

Merciless *šédu* who were created on the bulwark of heaven.

They are makers of trouble.

They uphold wickedness, they come daily to make trouble.

They attack to commit murder.

Among the seven, firstly there is the south wind.

The second is the great viper, whose wide open mouth slayeth every man.

The third is an angry panther, whose mouth knows no mercy.

The fourth is a terrible adder . . .

The fifth is the raging lion which knows not how to retreat.

The sixth is a rising [wind] which attacks god and king.

The seventh is the north wind, evil wind which wrathfully smites.

Seven are they, messengers of the Heaven God, the lord." •

The general word for "devils" actually means "ghost"; but it is clear that some of the demons are pure creatures of mythological fancy, especially those of the winds and disease.

The ghost devils of Hebrew mythology are the Raphâim, who dwelt in the land aforetime. Og of Bashan was the last of these giants or monsters of old times in Moab. They are described as giants of old times in Canaan. One had six fingers and six toes, and Og's bed was nine cubits long and four cubits wide. Chedorlaomer in the days of Abraham smote them in

<sup>1</sup> An article on this seal has been unavoidably delayed by the editors of a certain volume of essays since 1927.

Asteroth Garnaim. Although the Hebrews describe the giants of ancient times in Moab and Canaan as Raphâim or sons of Rhaphâ, there is no doubt but that Raphâim also means "souls of the dead". The word is perfectly known in Hebrew and Phœnician, and occurs often in Babylonia, *rabû* "to sink into darkness". The Raphâim belong to genuine West Semitic mythology and represent a belief common to Sumerian and Semitic religion. There is no borrowing from Babylonia here, but it should be noted that the Raphâim of Hebrew demonology do not figure in the future evolution toward the concept of Satan.

In the third register of this seal is a woman in child-birth, being protected by two priests at her head, while the serpent-headed devil attacks her at the foot. In the lower register is the terrible she-devil Lamme. She was the baby-killer, the dreaded child-seizer of Sumerian and Babylonian religion. Here she has been cursed, provided with food, and sent away on an ass to the infernal world. This demoness Lamme survived in Greek demonology as Lammia. Sappho mentions Lammia who desired to slay all babes.

In the text cited above, the devils are also called *šêdu*. A Sumerian text describes the devils as:—

"The *šêdu* decimating heaven and earth, and the land,  
Whose power is of Heaven, whose roving is in Heaven.  
Once on a time in the place of the forms of the gods,  
In the house of the holy chamber, in the house of the goddess  
of flocks of the goddess of grain they grew fat.  
Full of wickedness are they.  
(Cause them to swear the curse, and may they never return  
outside or inside (this house)."

The *šêdu* are represented as bulls; according to the Sumerian manner of writing their name they are described as "bulls of the pit", bovine spirits of the nether world. These were the dreadful messengers of Nergal, lord of hell. Nergal lord of the dead is the Sumerian god of summer heat, of plague and pestilence. The Babylonians called him Malku, the king. For some reason the cult of this infernal deity was

deeply rooted in Canaan and Phoenicia. The god of Tyre was Melki-qarti, "Milku of the city," or Melqart.

The Canaanites made human sacrifices to Malik or Milik in the Valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, as the Carthaginians did to Melqart. This is the Moloch of the Hebrew text, the god of inferno and the dead.

These bull demons, the *šēdu* messengers of Nergal or Malik-Moloch, are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. A Hebrew poet, in the Song of Moses, refers to these foreign deities and demons of Babylonia.

"They made him jealous with strange gods,  
They sacrificed to the Shēdim which are not gods.  
To gods whom they knew not,  
To new gods that came in of late."

The author of the 106th Psalm says that in the ancient days of pagan Canaan sons and daughters were sacrificed to the Shēdim. Baruch, a Jew, writing in the time of Jesus Christ, mentions these same devils, the Shēdim.

The Babylonians and especially the Assyrians made huge figures of these winged bulls and set them at the portals of their palace gates. These were the good *šēdim*, protectors of the royal abode. This custom arose from fear that demons might enter the palace, for they were held to be constantly at war with the gods and their representative on earth, the king. The threshold was especially dangerous and the most likely place which the devils would attack. The same idea prevailed among the Hebrews. There are in a late passage of Exodus detailed regulations concerning the robe of the high priest. To the hem of this robe were sewn golden bells that "the sound should be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place and when he cometh out that he die not".

I may be permitted at this point to stray from the ethical discussion into rituals briefly. This practice of sounding bells when one crosses the threshold or the ringing of bells in the temple is clearly founded upon the belief that bells alarm and deter the devils.

A bronze bell has been recovered from Assyria having the same figures of the seven demons designed *repoussé* on its surface.<sup>1</sup> The Sumerians called it the *urud nigkalag* or "copper instrument of power", and the Babylonians borrowed the word as *nikalaggú*. And here is a description from a ritual of 2400 B.C. A demon let loose from the lower world had attacked a man<sup>1</sup> :—

" He was torn asunder from his soul,  
Like waters in full flood he trembled.  
Food he ate not, water he drank not."

The god Marduk saw it and went to his father Ea, the water god, for instructions. His father said :—

" Go my son, fill the *asammu* jar with water.  
Put tamarisk and nard in it.  
Cast the incantation of Eridu on that water.  
Wash this man, bring out the torch.  
The curse which is in the body of the man will flow away like water.  
The bell, champion of the Heaven-god, whose awful peal terrifies,  
Which expels all evil take thou.  
Where its peal falls bring him, verily it is thy helper."

I do not imply that this ritual of bell-ringing in Hebrew was borrowed from Babylonia. It is common in the magic of all superstitious religions, but historical circumstances invite one to infer that the whole custom of bell-ringing may have spread from Sumer.

The Sumerian and Babylonian demon *lilú* and the female *lilítu* were evil spirits of the winds, causes of sexual sin. *Lilítu* or *Lilith* passed into Hebrew mythology in post-exilic times. In the present book of Isaiah there is a prophecy against Edom :—

" Wild beasts will meet jackals,  
And Satyr cry to its fellow.  
Only Lilith shall rest there  
And find for herself a place of repose."

<sup>1</sup> Gressmann, *Texte und Bilder*, fig. 572.

The demons of Babylonia swarmed over the whole of western Asia, passed into Greek demonology, hence into Christian demonology, and have hardly ceased to exercise an important role in the Christian Church to this day. There was the Babylonian *gallû* who attacks the hands of man. The Greeks confounded this devil with Lammea, the child-snatcher, and under the name Gellô she is a demonesse to this day in Christian Roumania. Nearly every one of the names of the horde of Babylonian devils passed into Greek, Jewish, and Christian demonology.

This is an endless aspect of magic, but I hope before taking up the subject of Satan to have made this point clear. Hebrew religion as it advances toward an absolute monotheism assigns an increasing sphere of influence to the devils. Jewish religion in the time of Jesus is surcharged with demonology, and the Babylonian legend of the seven devils was widely believed in New Testament times. This sudden emphasis of the Satanic powers in the daily life of man, and in a period when the Hebrew religion was culminating in a lofty conception of monotheism, in noble doctrines of ethical purity, is clearly due to Babylonian influence.

It may be truly said that among other things the far-flung and ancient civilization of Sumer and Babylonia bequeathed to Judaism and Christianity the doctrine of inherent evil in the world. They literally gave them their conception of the Devil.

In the horde of Babylonian devils it is difficult to say who was the greatest. No one among them emerges as supreme, but they are all "sons of the gods". Now this idea that the devils were sons of god, supernatural beings, and incarnation of sin, is borrowed by the Hebrews. In Babylonia they are the adversaries of the gods and kings. This idea that the demons are adversaries of god is good Babylonian mythology. There is eternal war between the gods and their own creation, the demons.

In late Hebrew demonology Satan appears as one of "the

sons of god". This word means "adversary", and in Job he came before Yāv among the "sons of god", as the adversary of Job, the seducer of the righteous.

It is clear that the Hebrews called the devils "sons of god" by fully accepting Babylonian theology. It is also clear that the chief of these demons was named "the adversary" for the same reason. On this plate Nos. 7 and 8 shew Sumerian devils as adversaries of the Sun-god. These are very realistic expressions of that very ancient idea. Both seals come from a period before 2000 B.C. Now note that on both of these seals the demons wear the same horned turban as does the Sun-god himself. This is the infallible mark of divinity in Sumerian representations of gods.

At Kish we excavated the grave of a princess whose Sumerian seal was published in this JOURNAL, 1930, Pl. IX, No. 1. This grave comes from a period about 2900 B.C., and shows that the idea of the devils at war with the gods is already firmly established. There is absolutely no difference in the representations of gods and devils here.

Nearly 4000 years ago the theory of Satan adversary of the gods and man is here, and it is traceable without lacunæ to the present day.

With the later theological development in Judaism and Christianity, where Satan or Belial represents the material world over against the spiritual world, my discussion must end. This conception is new and ended in asceticism, renunciation of all things material and the religious orders of Christianity. It must be pointed out that even with the authority of St. Paul behind it this conception is not earlier than the late Judaistic period. It is neither Babylonian nor Hebrew. It substitutes for an ancient monism a theological dualism. But Persian dualism, so far as I can see, never had the slightest influence upon this long development. If the Devil has been throughout the ages to the present day a very real mythological person in Judaism and Christianity, Sumer and Babylonia are the ultimate source of that conception.