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Nebo of Birs-Nimrud

On Nebabel, the City of God, built by Nebochadnezzar

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[This manuscript in H.P.B.'s handwriting was in the possession of John M. Watkins, the renowned Publisher and Bookseller, who was a close friend of hers. It is marked XV (a) and covers a little over twelve numbered pages. It may have been intended for *The Secret Doctrine* and later set aside. A few words or brief sentences have remained illegible. It has been transcribed from a microfilm of the original MS. now in the hands of Geoffrey Watkins. — *Compiler.*]

S*ED et Serpens*¹ . . . What capital the Church has made of this! But where is that spot which antiquity, with its virtue loving philosophers and Saintly Sages, has left without this symbol? The Dragon or Serpent has ever been made to allegorize eternity and divine intelligence and hidden Wisdom. The old sidereal and astronomical Serpent is now the fallen Jupiter, the prototype of the fallen Archangel; the Prince of the Air has become on the mediaeval paintings a kind of fantastic *Dra-co-volans*, one of the forms of the tempter of Eden. Dragons and Serpents everywhere, even to the Light-bearer, the dazzling Lucifer who has now become the Prince of Darkness and the “Infernal” Ophidian. When the Christian nations, by destroying the seats of learning, and the pagan temples, had lost the key to the real meaning of that symbol and the old Dracontine structures, their clergy chose to see the devil’s horn and hoof peeping out [from the] foundation of every glorious fane, every old non-Christian temple.

The true philosophical meaning of the legends and allegories on the sacred serpent, is now almost entirely lost. The reason why the old Egyptians found in the Dragon and its numerous offshoots of Ophidian variety something *divine* has been variously but never satisfactorily explained. Divine, says Aelianus in his *Nature of Animals*² — yes; but at the same time it had better be left alone, *divinius quodque praestet ignorari*; and he adds in a kind of parenthetical way, that the true object of the Athenians in feeding large serpents in their temples was “to have always on hand *prophets.*” But the same is done to this day not only by the “heathen” Hindu, but also by the Unitarian Theistic Mussulmans of Cairo, and other Mohammedan centres, whose wise men have the same explanation to offer as the wise men of old. The sacred dragon of Epidaurus fabled to have come by himself at the call of the people from that city, de-

¹ [Cf. *Genesis* iii, 1 — ED. PHIL.]

² Bk. XI, ch. xvii



manded that a temple should be built for him on the Tiber, at the foot of Mount Palatine; where, transformed “they never ceased to consult him as a prophet.”³

The word *Dragon*, as said, is a term, which signified with every ancient people that which it is made to mean even today with the Chinese — long, or the ‘being which excels in intellect and in Greek *δρακων* means “he who sees and watches.” According to J. de Cambry⁴ “*drouk* in the language of Brittany, in France, means *devil*, whence the *droghedanum sepulcrum* or the ‘diabolical tomb.’ In Languedoc the elemental spirits are called *drac*; in French *drogg* and in Bretonian the terms *dreag*, *wraie Wran* have evidently the same origin, and the *Drogheda* Castle in Brittany has the same etymology [but] in every one of the cases above cited the connection of these terms with the ‘devil’ had a Christian, hence a later significance. None of the words cited had that meaning during the pre-Christian periods.⁵

But now, as just said, every ‘pagan’ monument is connected with the spirit of evil. A good instance of it is afforded in the word *Babel*, which meant in days of old ‘the palace (or dwelling) of God.’ Voltaire expressed surprise why the word should be made to render ‘confusion’ (of tongues) . . . “As *ba* signifies ‘father’ in all the Oriental tongues, and *bel* is ‘God,’ thence Babel ought to read the ‘city of God.’⁶ The church claimed otherwise, maintaining that *babel* was ‘confusion.’

But now comes Assyriology and announces a new discovery. It translates a Babylonian cylinder through the pen of Mr. J. Oppert, and finds that whatever the word *Babel* may or may not have meant in the days of Noah (who never was), in those of Nebuchadnezzar, the King who reconstructed, as he himself narrates it on a . . . Birs-Nimrud, one to Nebo, God of Wisdom, the other to Bal-Merodach, his father, — nothing of the kind is meant. We have in England, the translation from the inscription on the tile found by Colonel Rawlinson at Borsippa, or *Birs Nimrud*, and nothing reminding us of the confusion of the tongues, or the Babel, can, by any possibility be inferred from that record. What it states is, that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, rebuilt the edifices — “the seven storied tower” and “the temple of the *Seven lights*”; which temple (the original Babel) had, *forty-two generations before*, been destroyed by an earthquake. Further we learn that this fane had ever served and been erected from the first for astrological purposes; *i.e.*, that it had been built in honour of the *Seven lights* or the seven planetary spirits, identical with the “Seven Spirits of God” of Christian. . . . Now as divine worship was offered to them more or less openly ever since the VIIIth century throughout the middle ages: and that the same is done to this day, by the Roman Catholics⁷ — we really see no valid reason why these “Spirits” should have been less divine or more devilish, or again more serpent-like, when worshipped in Babylon, than they are when paid divine honours in Rome?

³ *Val. Max.* Bk. I, viii, § 2

⁴ *Monumens Celtiques*, p. 299

⁵ de Mirville, *Des Esprits*, Vol. II, p. 423 fn. 1

⁶ *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Art. ‘Babel’

⁷ *Vide* Vol. II of *Lucifer*, pp. 355 et seq. on the Worship of the Seven Spirits in the Roman Catholic Church. [See also C. W., Vol. X, pp. 13-32.]



The fact is that the Tower of Babel fabled to have been built by Nimrod, had no connection with the real tower built in Babylonia till the compilers of the Book of Moses made one. Nor does “Babel” have anything to do with the Hebrew word *babel* or *ba-bil*, “stammering,” for even the correct pronunciation of its name is now forgotten. A legend preserved by the nomadic tribes of Asia Minor speaks of a tower called *Ne-babel*, and this was the real name of the pyramid rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar, its etymology being the easiest and the simplest thing in the world, when we remember who was Nebo. Indeed, he is the son of Merodach, or *Bel*, and it is in honour of that God of Wisdom “the Saviour, the Sage, who leads men to the voice and receives the light of the Great God, his father” (the Son) — that the fane was built, and which, was named *Nebabel* or “Nebo (son of) the father, or El.”

This deity was closely connected with the magnificent *Birs-Nimrud* for the simple reason that his fane was situated in the upper tower of the seven stories that constituted the pyramidal building of Birs-Nimrud.⁸ Herodotus is our authority for this. He speaks of it⁹ calling it the temple of Jupiter-Belus — and mentions the chapel or tower on the last or seventh storey (describing it though as the eighth) wherein one sees a golden table near the tomb of the God with a most magnificent bed on which *Nebo* rested at certain periods.

The fact that *Babil*, *babeluch* or *babel* mean in Syrian and Hebrew “confused talk” as shown by de Rougemont, and that according to him “the cuneiform inscriptions seem to corroborate Moses”¹⁰ means very little indeed to anyone except those interested in the vindication of the Biblical statements. For, the slightest alteration of a vowel, or wrong accent or inflection, may give quite another signification to any word and thus alter entirely its primitive meaning and idea. The Babylonian priests, who, according to Cicero “assert that they have preserved upon their monuments observations, extending back during an interval of 470,000 years”¹¹ may have exaggerated or may not, still a considerable number of millenniums must have elapsed between the early and primitive, post-diluvian formation of the Chaldean languages and the Hebrew of the later, surviving scrolls in which *babel* is called “confusion” and thus made to furnish a pretext for identifying this word with the Babylonian tower, for Biblical purposes. Hence, the wide margin for speculation.

At any rate, modern science having come to the wise conclusion that it would be a rather dangerous stretch of faith to admit that “all the languages of the different races could have been created at one start and simultaneously under the mysterious influence of divine intervention,”¹² the rendering of Babel by *confusion* may be laid aside and left to Biblical specialists.

⁸ *Birs*, “the dwelling of the gods,” or the Seven Spirits, of Nimrod . . . astro . . . and Chaldean.

⁹ Book I, § 181

¹⁰ *Peuples Primitifs*, Vol. III, p. 96. [*Peuple primitif, sa religion, son histoire et sa civilisation*, by (F. de Rougemont), Geneva, 1855-57; 2 pts. in 3 vols.]

¹¹ *De Divinatione*, i, 36. [See p. 267 in the English trs. of Wm. Armistead Falconer; *Loeb Classical Library*, London, Heinemann Ltd., 1964 ed.]

¹² Renan, *Langues Semitiques*. [*Histoire Générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, by Ernest Renan. See p. 24 ff. in 3rd ed., Paris, L'imprimerie Impériale, 1893.]



Nebo then, the “God” in the popular ideal, and esoterically — the mysterious POWER that presides over the planet Mercury — the symbol and “House of Secret Wisdom,” was . . . who was addressed by the Khaldi¹³ as “Thou who generated thyself *out of thyself*” — *Divine Wisdom*, in short. All that is known in connection with this “deity” may be found on the cylinder discovered and brought to Europe by Colonel Rawlinson.¹⁴ The . . . was translated from its cuneiform¹⁵ . . . by Mr. Jules Oppert, the distinguished Orientalist and member of the Asiatic Society of Paris, and later by George Smith. The dead letter of the rendering, even left standing as it is in the imperfect translation, is calculated to reveal to the student of Occultism the true character of the “God” addressed.

Here it is:

“I, *Nebochadnezzar*, King of Babylon, servant of the Eternal One occupying the heart of Merodach, the Supreme Monarch who exalts the Nebo, the Saviour the Sage, *who lends his ear to the instruction of that great god: the Vicar-King . . .* who has reconstructed the pyramid and the tower of [stages]. I, the son of *Nebopolassar*, King of Babylonia.

“Merodach the great Lord has generated me, and ordered to reconstruct his abode. Nebo, who watches *over the hosts of heaven and of earth* has armed my hand with the sceptre of justice.

“The pyramid is the grand temple of Heaven and Earth, the abode of the Master of the Gods — Merodach. The sanctuary thereof, I have restored in pure gold, the place of rest of his Sovereignty. The seven storied Tower¹⁶ the eternal House that I rebuilt and refounded, I constructed it, out of silver, gold and other metals in enamelled bricks in cedar and cypress, and have achieved its magnificence . . .”

. . . “I achieved the *first* edifice, the temple in the foundations of the Earth, with which the memory of Babylon is connected and raised its summit in bricks and brass.

“For the *second*, which is this edifice: the temple of the Seven *lights of the Earth*¹⁷ with which the memory of Borsippa (*Birs Nimrud*) is connected, com-

¹³ [“The earliest inhabitants of Chaldea who were first the worshippers of the Moon god, Deus Lunus, a worship which was brought to them by the great stream of early Hindu emigration, and later a caste of regular Astrologers and Initiates.” *Theosophical Glossary* — ED. PHIL.]

¹⁴ [Rawlinson, Henry. See Vol. II of his *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Asia*. 1866.]

¹⁵ [See pp. 15-20 ff. of the *Inscription de Nebuchodonosor sur les Merveilles de Babylone*; Communication faite à L’Académie Impériale de Reims par M. J. Oppert. Printed in Reims by P. Dubois et Cie in 1866; it contains in full the French passages rendered into English below. A copy is located in the U.S.A. at the University of Chicago library. — *Compiler*.]

¹⁶ According to Rawlinson’s reading of the tiles, the Birs-Nimrud had seven stages symbolical of the concentric circles of the seven spheres each built of tiles and *metals* to correspond with the colour of the ruling planet of the sphere typified. (Cf. H.C. Rawlinson, “On the Birs-Nimrud, or the Great Temple of Borsippa,” in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. XVIII, 1861, pp. 17-19). [George Smith gives details of Rawlinson’s excavation on pp. 164-66 of his *Chaldean Account of Genesis, Secret Doctrine* ref. series, Minneapolis, Wizards Bookshelf, 1977.] The correct following of the special colour of each planet is now shown by telescopic and spectroscopic discoveries of modern science. [See *Isis*, I, p. 261; S.D., II, p. 806, TPH Adyar, 1979.]

¹⁷ The lights are the Seven Planets — symbolized in the Jewish tabernacle by the seven-branched candlestick.



menced by the first King — from whose reign forty-two human lives have elapsed¹⁸ — and by whom the summit was left unfinished ages ago, the expression of whose thoughts having been uttered in disorder.” (The plan of the building having been left too undefined, some Orientalists translate; “Earthquake and thunder had unsettled the fresh bricks which crumbling down had formed hillocks.”)

“To rebuild it the great god Merodach engaged my heart; I did not touch at the site, nor interfered with its foundation . . . but renewed the circular banisters . . . and raised the summit thereof.

“Nebo, thou who generates thyself, Supreme Intelligence . . . bless my works . . . favour me forever with a race *in times to come, the septenary multiplication in rebirths* (to be a perfect septenary being in every reincarnation), the victory of the throne, etc., etc. . . . Nebuchadnezzar, the King who rebuilt this, remains prostrate before thy face.”

The name *Nebuzardan*, or *Nebo* and *Nebu*, seems to mean only in Hebrew “Nebu is the Lord” [Hebrew]; but in Persian and with the ancient people it had always signified Nebu, the *wise* (Lord). Hence the prefix *Nebu* attached to the name of every initiated adept consecrated to the service of Bel and Nebo “*the overseer of all the celestial and terrestrial legions*” — or “hosts.” Hence *Nebu-Kadan-Assur*, *Nebu-Pal-Assur*, *Nebu-Zaradan*, etc., etc. *Nebu*, in short, was an abstract quality: personified — when the seventh principle, the “Higher Self” of man was meant, an adjective — when applied to any special subject, and finally the synthetic attribute of the Seven Chaldean gods — the Planetary Spirits. Mercury was no more entitled than any other of his six colleagues to the appellation of Nebo, but was so-called owing to later thought seeking to combine the identity of God, planet and attribute in one. There is also a profound thought hitherto of . . . by modern Jew or Christian in the fact that Moses dies, and is buried on Pisgah of Mount NEBO.

The student of Occultism will do well to ponder over the materials and measurements, used under the minute instruction of the Lord God of Israel himself, in the construction of the tabernacle¹⁹ — if he is desirous of learning how the “abode of a god” — be it called a tabernacle, a house, a pyramid or a tower — was constructed for *occult* purposes. If measurements — in “weight, measure and number” of such buildings, now found to be *symbolically* and *esoterically* the perfect copy of one another — are discovered identical when studied with the help of metrology and geometry, also shown to correspond *astronomically* to planets (earth included) in their conjunctions, diameters and circumference, etc.; how much more might be discovered if their architecture and materials were studied by the light of alchemy, occult correspondences and psycho-physics. If the secret potencies latent in every metal, wood, colour and fabric — as for instance as *goats hair* — were ascertained, and the correlative forces thereof found out in the manifold combinations of such objects, then would the world have undeniable proof that the “ark” and “mercy seat” of the protecting deity of the people of Israel, were simply *identical* with the “seventh story”

¹⁸ Forty-two *centuries*, a human life being counted of a 100 year’s duration.

¹⁹ See *Exodus xxv et seq.*



and the “place of rest” of the “Lord God” of the Chaldees — *their* national and protecting deity. That the same disposition and combination of “gold, silver and brass,” of “blue and purple and scarlet, of fine linen and goats hair,” of *shettim*²⁰ wood, rams skins dyed red and *onyx* and brass — was required in the tabernacle of the Chaldean *Bel*²¹ or Nebo, as in that of the Jewish El or Jehovah — if *either of these Powers were expected to manifest in, and speak from their respective-magical recesses*. Finally they would receive undeniable proof that if the supposed Astrolatry of the Chaldeans was *Idolatry* — so was the supposed monotheism of the Jews. For if the Babylonian *Bel* meant the SUN — the Jehovah of the Israelites meant SATURN. Each of the “Gods” of the nations had his “*Star*,” or planet; and that *star* of the same name, was the supposed *house* or habitation of that angel. “Ye have borne the tabernacle of your *Moloch* and *Chiun*, your images, *the star of your god*” complains through Amos the “Lord”(?)²² Who are *Moloch* and *Chiun* but *Baal* — the later *Bel*? Every particle of their religion came to the Jews from the Chaldeans and the Egyptians; Daniel is described in the Bible as a Rabbi, the chief of the Babylonian astrologers and Magi, therefore one sees the Assyrian little bulls and the attributes of *Śiva* reappearing under a hardly modified form in the cherubs of the Talmudistic Jews, as one traces the bull *Apis* in the Sphinxes or Cherubs of the Mosaic Ark and as one finds several thousand years later that same Assyrian bull, the Egyptian Lion with the addition of the bird of Jupiter, the Eagle, in company with the face of an Angel — four Kabalistic figures — represented with the four Apostles of the New Testament.

Nebo presided at, and inspired the Khaldi during the long period of Babylonian civilization, most evidently. No modern means at the disposition of our architects could help to build such gigantic cities and edifices in our century as were Babylon and Nineveh. And yet these are supposed to be no older than some nineteen centuries B.C., built by the grandchildren of the solitary family that survived the Deluge!

The three Orientalists — Oppert, Fresnel and Thomas — sent by their government on a scientific mission to “Mesopotamia” in 1851, on their return wrote of Babylon; — “Fancy a surface ten times as large as Paris within its actual precincts, a surface larger than the whole Department of the Sein — surrounded by a wall eighty feet thick, and from 105 to 328 feet high; namely, the precise height of the arrow on the Invalides; that is Babylon.” Oppert having found on the site of the giant city the modulus of the Babylonian measures, which confirms exactly the statements given by Herodotus, whose figures make of Babylon “an immense square, every side of which was 120 *stades* long, hedged in by a thick wall 50 royal cubits thick, and 200 high” — these measurements can hardly fail being exact. The famous inscription by Nebuchadnezzar, moreover, confirms Herodotus. “The pyramids of Egypt themselves would seem dwarfed in ancient Babylon” — remarks a writer.

²⁰ *Shettim* wood, does not mean “a kind of acacia tree” but any sweet smelling wood *consecrated for THEURGICAL purposes*; such as sandal, cypress, etc., etc.

²¹ Abbreviation of *Ab* (father) and *El* (God), perhaps?

²² *Amos* v, 26. The “chosen people” seem to have worshipped that *Star* for forty years in the wilderness — therefore that star was the habitation of Jehovah — which makes him identical with *Chiun*, *Moloch*.



The most curious document, however, with regard to this subject is a paper read by the same Mr. Jules Oppert before the Academy of Fine Arts; subject — “Cuniform Assyrian Inscriptions” — a few extracts from it may now be given.

The oldest documents in the possession of the Orientalists are the tiles used as recording tablets by the Kings of lower Chaldea, believed to be at least as old as from the XXXth to the XXth B.C. A translation of an inscription by King Tiglatpileser, was made some twenty-five years ago in London by four different Orientalists, simultaneously and independently, at the desire of the Asiatic Society.²³ And those four versions were found, owing to their concordance, to leave little doubt as to the correct meaning of the main features of the historical facts inscribed. Most of the tiles (cylinders) are of the period of Sargon, the King-founder of Khorsabad, whose history (that of Moses, the legend of his childhood as in the Bible, nearly word for word) was discovered and published for the world by the late George Smith.²⁴ The cities and monuments built by Sargon are numberless, and his son the great conqueror Senacherib continued to build after him. In the inscriptions of the Bulls, Sargon describes the religious ceremony in this wise:

“In the valley . . . under Ninivia I built a city and called it Hisri-Sargon. To populate this city and preserve the memory of the destroyed altars, I have built altars to the great Gods, and palaces for my Majesty to dwell in . . . I then selected places at Hisri-Sargon for Nisroch, Sin (Iunus), Samas (the Sun), Ao (Saturn).²⁵ Ninip Sandan, etc., etc., and their sculptured images (statues).”

Further on the religious ceremony laying the foundations is described, and the specialities of all the gods and goddesses. Not being at present concerned with these, that which relates to Nebo alone may be given:

“The tower of Babylon” goes on to say Oppert — “now known as Birs-Nimrud was formed of seven square towers, superposed on one another, and supported on an immense substructure.” Herodotus names eight for he made the mistake of taking the latter for a tower also.²⁶ “On the top story was the great temple, wherein a single couch was placed *on which rested the god* when he appeared.” All the texts speak of the top tower as *the place of rest of the god* NEBO . . . below, there was another temple sacred to Nebo. The tower of Borsippa was, it is true, especially reserved to that god. Nevertheless, the inscription quoted speaks clearly of “the sanctuary of Nebo *which is in the pyramid* and that was named *Babil* or the place wherein . . . assembled and spoke the Oracles.”

Therefore the account given of the tower of Babel in chapter xi of *Genesis* is purely allegorical and was never understood. The tower of Babel had its shrine wherein the gods or *the god* spoke through the oracles, in the same way as the god of the Jews or

²³ [“The Inscription of Tiglat Pileser I,” in: *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 164-219.]

²⁴ [In his *Assyrian Discoveries* . . . pp. 224-25, N.Y. Scribner Armstrong & Co., 1975, Smith relates the tale of Sargon and refers to the text he originally translated in the “Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology,” Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 46.]

²⁵ Or Iao — which is Jehovah, as well as Saturn. Diodorus states that among the Jews they relate that Moses called the God Iao. Theodoret says they pronounced it Iaho. It is only owing to their late invention of the Masoretic points that the Rabbis sounded Jehovah, Adonai, and so on. (See pp. 301-302, *Isis Unveiled* Vol. II.)

²⁶ [Herodotus, Book I, 181.]



the gods (angels) spoke through the high-priests and even *viva voce*, with the Israelites. The tabernacle and the ark were no holier than the place of rest and the oracular shrine. Both were the sanctuaries of SPEAKING GODS.²⁷



²⁷ Kircher gives the *modus operandi* from old MSS in the Vatican. “On the sacred altar of every temple,” he says — “stood represented the *Rulers of the World* (Spirits of the Planets) adorned with their respective insignia; around the altar, attentive priests watching what would be shown them by the latter, as to the revelations of the future they were to receive after due invocation, through an aperture in the middle of the table — all of which was called the *great portal of the gods*.” (*Oedip. Aegypt.*, in: *Tabula Isiaca*). [Philosophical Research Society, Los Angeles, 1976, Reprint of W.W. Westcott’s 1886 ed.]

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