

THE
LEGEND OF ISHTAR
DESCENDING TO HADES.

TRANSLATED BY
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THIS very curious Legend is found on a tablet in the British Museum marked K 162.

Some years ago I received a photograph of it, from which I made a translation in 1865, which was published in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, Vol. VIII., p. 244. But about one third of the tablet had been broken off, which materially damaged the sense. Since that time Mr. G. Smith has discovered in the Museum the missing portion of the tablet, and it is now nearly entire. I published another translation (including this new portion) in the *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, Vol. II. p. 179 (June 1873) and Mr. Smith has published a translation in the *Daily Telegraph* of August 19, 1873 in which many difficult passages are

cleared up. I have carefully revised these translations and think that the general sense of the Legend is now well established.

ISHTAR was the goddess of Love ; answering to the Venus of the Latins and the Aphrodite of the Greeks. The object of her descent into the infernal regions was probably narrated in another tablet, which has not been preserved : for no motive is assigned for it here. I conjecture that she was in search of her beloved Thammuz-Adonis who was detained in Hades by Persephone or Proserpine. We may compare the Greek legend, which was as follows, as given by Panyasis (quoted by Apollodorus)—

“Aphrodite had intrusted Adonis, who was a very beautiful child, during his infancy to the care of Persephone ; but she fell in love with him, and refused to restore him. Upon this Aphrodite appealed to Jupiter, who gave judgment in the cause. He decreed that Adonis should remain for one third of the year in the infernal regions with Persephone : one third of the year in heaven with Aphrodite : the remaining third of the year was to be at his own disposal. Adonis chose to spend it in heaven with Aphrodite.”¹ The Assyrian legend differs much from this, but yet has some resemblance.

¹ Creuzer's Symbolik, Vol. II., p. 423.

COLUMN I.

1 To the land of Hades, the region of her desire
 2 ISHTAR daughter of the Moon-god SAN turned her
 mind,
 3 and the daughter of SAN fixed her mind (*to go there*):
 4 to the house where all meet : the dwelling of the god

Irkalla :

5 to the house men enter, but cannot depart from :
 6 to the road men go, but cannot return.
 7 The abode of darkness and famine
 8 where earth is their food : their nourishment clay :
 9 light is not seen : in darkness they dwell :
 10 ghosts, like birds, flutter their wings there ;
 11 on the door and gate-posts the dust lies undisturbed.

12 When ISHTAR arrived at the gate of Hades
 13 to the keeper of the gate a word she spoke :
 14 "O keeper of the entrance ! open thy gate !
 15 "Open thy gate ! I say again, that I may enter !
 16 "If thou openest not thy gate, and I enter not,
 17 "I will assault the door : I will break down the
 gate :
 18 "I will attack the entrance : I will split open the
 portals :

19 "I will raise the dead, to be the devourers of the living!

20 "Upon the living, the dead shall prey!"¹

21 Then the Porter opened his mouth and spoke,

22 and said to the great ISHTAR,

23 "Stay, Lady! do not shake down the door!

24 "I will go, and tell this to the Queen NIN-KI-GAL."²

25 The Porter entered, and said to NIN-KI-GAL,

26 "These curses thy sister ISHTAR (*utters*)³

27 "blaspheming thee with great curses."

28 When NIN-KI-GAL heard this,

29 she grew pale, like a flower that is cut off:

30 she trembled like the stem of a reed:

31 "I will cure her rage, she said; I will cure her fury:

32 "these curses I will repay to her!

33 "Light up consuming flames! light up blazing straw!

34 "Let her groan with the husbands who deserted their wives!

35 "Let her groan with the wives who from their husbands' side departed!

36 "Let her groan with the youths who led dishonoured lives!

37 "Go, Porter, open the gate for her,

38 "but strip her, like others at other times."

39 The Porter went and opened the gate.

40 "Enter, Lady of Tiggaba⁴ city! It is permitted!

¹ This very violent language is evidently introduced by the writer of this Legend, in order to justify the subsequent wrath of Proserpine.

² Nin-ki-gal answers to the Proserpine of the Latins. Her name means "goddess of the great region," *i.e.*, Hades.

³ The end of this and several following lines is broken off, which makes the translation uncertain.

⁴ A principal seat of Ishtar's worship.

41 "The Sovereign of Hades will come to meet thee!"

42 The first gate admitted her, and stopped her: there was taken off the great Crown from her head.

43 "Keeper! do not take off from me, the great Crown from my head!"

44 "Enter, Lady! for the Queen of the land demands her jewels!"

45 The second gate admitted her, and stopped her: there were taken off the earrings of her ears.

46 "Keeper! do not take off from me, the earrings of my ears!"

47 "Enter, Lady! for the Queen of the land demands her jewels!"

48 The third gate admitted her, and stopped her: there were taken off the precious stones from her head.

49 "Keeper! do not take off from me, the precious stones from my head!"

50 "Enter, Lady! for the Queen of the land demands her jewels!"

51 The fourth gate admitted her, and stopped her: there were taken off the small lovely gems from her forehead.

52 "Keeper! do not take off from me, the small lovely gems from my forehead!"

53 "Enter, Lady! for the Queen of the land demands her jewels!"

54 The fifth gate admitted her, and stopped her: there was taken off the emerald girdle of her waist.

55 "Keeper! do not take from off me, the emerald girdle from my waist!"

56 "Enter, Lady! for the Queen of the land demands her jewels!"

57 The sixth gate admitted her, and stopped her: there were taken off the golden rings of her hands and feet.

58 "Keeper! do not take off from me, the golden rings of my hands and feet!"

59 "Enter, Lady! for the Queen of the land demands her jewels!"

60 The seventh gate admitted her, and stopped her: there was taken off the last garment from her body.

61 "Keeper! do not take off from me, the last garment from my body!"

62 "Enter, Lady! for the Queen of the land demands her jewels!"

63 After that mother ISHTAR had descended into Hades

64 NIN-KI-GAL saw her, and derided her to her face.

65 ISHTAR lost her reason; and heaped curses upon her.

66 NIN-KI-GAL opened her mouth and spoke,

67 to NAMTAR her Messenger a command she gave :

68 "Go, NAMTAR!"

69 "Bring her out for punishment"¹

¹ The end of this line is lost and all the remaining lines of Column I. are similarly mutilated; I will therefore give their meaning in an abridged form. Namtar is commanded to afflict Ishtar with dire diseases of the eyes, the side, the feet, the heart, and the head. The story then says, that after the goddess of Love had descended to Hades, the world soon felt the loss of her influence. But as these lines are much broken, and are better preserved in the second Column, where they are repeated, I omit them here.

COLUMN II.

1 The divine Messenger of the gods, lacerated his face before them.¹

2 He tore his vest. Words he spoke rapidly.

3 the Sun approached : he joined the Moon his father.²

4 Weeping they spoke thus to HEA the King :

5 " ISHTAR descended into the earth ; and she did not rise again :

6 "and since the time that mother ISHTAR descended into Hades,

7 "the bull has not sought the cow, nor the male of any animal the female.

8 "The slave and her master (*some words lost*)

9 "The master has ceased from commanding :

10 "the slave has ceased from obeying."

11 Then the god HEA in the depth of his mind laid a plan :

12 he formed, for her escape, the figure of a man of clay.³

13 "Go to save her, Phantom ! present thyself at the portal of Hades ;

14 "the seven gates of Hades will open before thee,

15 "NIN-KI-GAL will see thee, and will come to meet thee.

16 "When her mind shall be grown calm, and her anger shall be worn off,

17 "awe her with the names of the great gods !

¹ A sign of violent grief in the East. Forbidden in Deut. xiv. 1 ; Lev. xix. 28. The bleeding face betokened a Messenger of evil news.

² This is no error of the scribe, for Nabonidus says in his inscription (Col. I. l. 17), "O Sun ! protect this temple, together with the Moon thy father !"

³ The original has *Assinnu*, which I have derived from the Chaldee word *Sin* "clay." But this is a mere conjecture. The meaning evidently is that Hea moulded a figure and breathed life into it. Hea was the god to whom all clever inventions were attributed. "*Lord of deep thoughts*" was one of his most usual titles.

18 "Prepare thy frauds ! On deceitful tricks fix thy mind !

19 "The chiefest deceitful trick ! Bring forth fishes of the waters out of an empty vessel !¹

20 "This thing will astonish NIN-KI-GAL :

21 "then to ISHTAR she will restore her clothing.

22 "A great reward for these things shall not fail.

23 "Go, save her, Phantom ! and the great assembly of the people shall crown thee !

24 "Meats, the first of the city, shall be thy food !

25 "Wine, the most delicious in the city, shall be thy drink !

26 "A royal palace shall be thy dwelling !

27 "A throne of state, shall be thy seat !

28 "Magician and Conjuror shall kiss the hem of thy garment !

29 NIN-KI-GAL² opened her mouth and spoke :

30 to NAMTAR her Messenger a command she gave :

31 "Go, NAMTAR ! clothe the Temple of Justice !³

32 "Adorn the *images* ? and the *altars* ?

33 "Bring out ANUNNAK !⁴ Seat him on a golden throne !

34 "Pour out for ISHTAR the waters of life, and let her depart from my dominions !"

¹ The present Legend was probably a kind of miracle Play which was actually performed in one of the temples. Juggling tricks, which have been known in the East from time immemorial (*vide* Pharaoh's magicians) were probably introduced for the amusement of the audience. Only one is related here, but there may have been many more.

² The things commanded are now supposed to have been successfully performed.

³ This seems to be the final scene of the Play, representing a magnificent hall or palace.

⁴ A genius, who is often mentioned. Here he seems to act the part of a judge, pronouncing the absolution of Ishtar.

- 35 NAMTAR went ; and clothed the Temple of Justice ;
36 he adorned the images and the altars ;
37 he brought out ANUNNAK ; on a golden throne he seated him ;
38 he poured out for ISHTAR the waters of life, and let her go.
39 Then the first gate let her forth, and restored to her, the first garment of her body.
40 The second gate let her forth, and restored to her, the diamonds of her hands and feet.
41 The third gate let her forth, and restored to her, the emerald girdle of her waist.
42 The fourth gate let her forth, and restored to her, the small lovely gems of her forehead.
43 The fifth gate let her forth, and restored to her, the precious stones of her head.
44 The sixth gate let her forth, and restored to her, the earrings of her ears.
45 The seventh gate let her forth, and restored to her, the great crown on her head.¹

[NOTE. There are 13 more lines, but they are much broken, and they appear not to relate to the above Legend. At any rate they belong to another Chapter of it which has not been hitherto alluded to. A satisfactory translation of them can therefore hardly be given.]

¹ Her ornaments are restored to her exactly in the reverse order that they were taken off.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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