

## ASSYRIAN SACRED POETRY.

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TRANSLATED BY

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THE following translations are some of those which I published in the *Transactions* of the *Society of Biblical Archæology* in order to show that the Assyrians had a firm belief in the immortality of the soul : a fact which was previously unknown.

I have added specimens of their penitential psalms, and some notices of their numerous superstitions, such as the exorcism of evil spirits, the use of magic knots and talismans, the belief in inherited or imputed sins, and in the great degree of holiness which they attri-

buted to the number *Seven*. In some of these respects we may evidently see how great an influence was exercised on the mind and belief of the Jews by their long residence at Babylon.



## ASSYRIAN SACRED POETRY.

A PRAYER FOR THE KING.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 "Length of days  
 2 long lasting years  
 3 a strong sword  
 4 a long life  
 5 extended years of glory  
 6 pre-eminence among Kings  
 7 grant ye to the King my Lord,  
 8 who has given such gifts  
 9 to his gods !  
 10 The bounds vast and wide  
 11 of his Empire  
 12 and of his Rule,  
 13 may he enlarge and may he complete !  
 14 Holding over all Kings supremacy  
 15 and royalty and empire  
 16 may he attain to grey hairs  
 17 and old age !  
 18 And after the life of these days,  
 19 in the feasts of the silver mountain,<sup>2</sup> the heavenly  
 Courts

<sup>1</sup> From the *Transactions* of the Society of Biblical Archæology, Vol. 1, p. 107. The original is in *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. 3, plate 66.

<sup>2</sup> The Assyrian Olympus. The epithet "silver" was doubtless suggested by some snowy inaccessible peak, the supposed dwellingplace of the gods.

- 20 the abode of blessedness :  
 21 and in the Light  
 22 of the *Happy Fields*,  
 23 may he dwell a life  
 24 eternal, holy  
 25 in the presence  
 26 of the gods  
 27 who inhabit Assyria !”
- 

A SHORT PRAYER FOR THE SOUL OF  
 A DYING MAN.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Like a bird may it fly to a lofty place !  
 2 To the holy hands of its god, may it ascend !
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ANOTHER.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The man, who is departing in *glory*  
 2 may his soul shine radiant as brass.  
 3 To that man  
 4 may the Sun give life !  
 5 and MARDUK, eldest Son of heaven  
 6 grant him an abode of happiness !<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> The Assyrians seem to have imagined the soul like a bird with shining wings rising to the skies. It is curious that they considered polished brass to be more beautiful than gold. A modern poet would have written differently.

THE DEATH OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Bind the sick man to Heaven, for from the Earth he is  
being torn away !
- 2 Of the brave man who was so strong, his strength has  
departed.
- 3 Of the righteous servant, the force does not return.
- 4 In his bodily frame he lies dangerously ill.
- 5 But ISHTAR, who in her dwelling is grieved concerning  
him
- 6 descends from her mountain, unvisited of men.
- 7 To the door of the sick man she comes.
- 8 The sick man listens !
- 9 Who is there ? Who comes ?
- 10 It is ISHTAR daughter of the Moon-god SIN :
- 11 It is the god (. . .) Son of BEL :
- 12 It is MARDUK, Son of the god (. . .).
- 13 They approach the body of the sick man.
- (The next line, 14, is nearly destroyed.)
- 15 They bring a *khisibta*<sup>2</sup> from the heavenly treasury.
- 16 They bring a *sisbu* from their lofty storehouse :
- 17 into the precious *khisibta* they pour bright liquor.
- 18 That righteous man, may he now rise on high !
- 19 May he shine like that *khisibta* !
- 20 May he be bright as that *sisbu* !
- 21 Like pure silver may his garment be shining white !
- 22 Like brass may he be radiant !
- 23 To the Sun, greatest of the gods, may he ascend !
- 24 And may the Sun, greatest of the gods, receive his  
soul into his holy hands !<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Probably a cup or drinking vessel.

<sup>3</sup> There is a fine inscription not yet fully translated, describing the soul in heaven, clothed in a white radiant garment, seated in the company of the blessed, and fed by the gods themselves with celestial food.

## PENITENTIAL PSALMS.

(These lamentations seem frequently to be incoherent. A few specimens are taken from the same work as the preceding.<sup>1</sup>)

O my Lord ! my sins are many, my trespasses are great ;  
and the wrath of the gods has plagued me with disease  
and with sickness and sorrow.

I fainted : but no one stretched forth his hand !

I groaned : but no one drew nigh !

I cried aloud : but no one heard !

O Lord ! do not abandon thy servant !

In the waters of the great storm, seize his hand !

The sins which he has committed, turn thou to righteousness !

## ELSEWHERE WE FIND.

1 O my god ! my sins are seven times seven !

2 O my goddess ! my sins are seven times seven !

(And then a prayer follows, that those sins may be pardoned as a father and mother would pardon them !)

## AN ADDRESS TO SOME DEITY.

In heaven who is great ? Thou alone art great !

On earth who is great ? Thou alone art great !

When thy voice resounds in heaven, the gods fall  
prostrate !

When thy voice resounds on earth, the genii kiss the  
dust !

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 60.

ELSEWHERE.<sup>1</sup>

O Thou ; thy words who can resist? who can rival them?

Among the gods thy brothers, thou hast no equal!

A PRAYER.<sup>2</sup>

The god my creator, may he stand by my side!

Keep thou the door of my lips! guard thou my hands,

O Lord of light!

## ODE TO FIRE.

(The original text of this will be found in 4 R 14 l. 6 which is a lithographic copy of the tablet K 44. A part of it was translated some years ago from a *photograph* of that tablet, see No. 430 of my *Glossary*.)

Very few Assyrian odes are so simple and intelligible as this is: unfortunately most of them are mystical and hard of interpretation.)

- 1 O FIRE, great Lord, who art the most exalted in the world,
- 2 noble Son of heaven, who art the most exalted in the world,
- 3 O FIRE, with thy bright flame
- 4 in the dark house thou dost cause light.
- 5 Of all things that can be named, Thou dost form the fabric!
- 6 Of bronze and of lead, Thou art the melter!

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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