Babylonia

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Chapter 6. Manners and Customs

"Girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity."--Ezek. xxiii. 15.

The manners and customs of the Babylonians, though not admitting of that copious illustration from ancient monuments which was found possible in the case of Assyria, are yet sufficiently known to us, either from the extant remains or from the accounts of ancient writers of authority, to furnish materials for a short chapter. Herodotus, Strabo, Diodorus, and Nicolas of Damascus, present us with many interesting traits of this somewhat singular people; the sacred writers contemporary with the acme of the nation add numerous touches; while the remains, though scanty, put distinctly and vividly before our eyes a certain number of curious details.

Herodotus describes with some elaboration the costume of the Babylonians in his day. He tells us that they wore a long linen gown reaching down to their feet, a woolen gown or tunic above this, a short cloak or cape of a white color, and shoes like those of the Boeotians. Their hair they allowed to grow long, but confined it by a head-band or a turban; and they always carried a walking-stick with a carving of some kind on the handle. This portraiture, it is probable, applies to the richer inhabitants of the capital, and represents the Babylonian gentleman of the fifth century before our era, as he made his appearance in the streets of the metropolis.

The cylinders seem to show that the ordinary Babylonian dress was less complicated. The worshipper who brings an offering to a god is frequently represented with a bare head, and wears apparently but one garment, a tunic generally ornamented with a diagonal fringe, and reaching from the shoulder to a little above the knee. The tunic is confined round the waist by a belt. Richer worshippers, who commonly present a goat, have a fillet or headband, not a turban, round the head. They wear generally the same sort of tunic as the others; but over it they have a long robe, shaped like a modern dressing-gown, except that it has no sleeves, and does not cover the right shoulder. In a few instances only we see underneath this open gown a long inner dress or robe, such as that described by Herodotus. A cape or tippet of the kind which he describes is worn sometimes by a god, but is never seen, it is believed, in any representation of a mortal.

The short tunic, worn by the poorer worshippers, is seen also in a representation (hereafter to be given) of hunters attacking a lion. A similar garment is worn by the man--probably a slave--who accompanies the dog,

supposed to represent an Indian hound; and also by a warrior, who appears on one of the cylinders conducting six foreign captives. There is consequently much reason to believe that such a tunic formed the ordinary costume of the common people, as it does at present of the common Arab inhabitants of the country. It left the arms and right shoulder bare, covering only the left. Below the belt it was not made like a frock but lapped over in front, being in fact not so much a garment as a piece of cloth wrapped round the body. Occasionally it is represented as patterned; but this is somewhat unusual.

In lieu of the long robe reaching to the feet, which seems to have been the ordinary costume of the higher classes, we observe sometimes a shorter, but still a similar garment--a sort of coat without sleeves, fringed down both sides, and reaching only a little below the knee. The worshippers who wear this robe have in most cases the head adorned with a fillet.

It is unusual to find any trace of boots or shoes in the representations of Babylonians. A shoe patterned with a sort of check work was worn by the king; and soldiers seem to have worn a low boot in their expeditions. But with rare exceptions the Babylonians are represented with bare feet on the monuments; and if they commonly wore shoes in the time of Herodotus, we may conjecture that they had adopted the practice from the example of the Medes and Persians. A low boot, laced in front, was worn by the chiefs of the Susianians. Perhaps the "peculiar shoe" of the Babylonians was not very different.

The girdle was an essential feature of Babylonian costume, common to high and low, to the king and to the peasant. It was a broad belt, probably of leather, and encircled the waist rather high up. The warrior carried his daggers in it; to the common man it served the purpose of keeping in place the cloth which he wore round his body. According to Herodotus, it was also universal in Babylonia to carry a seal and a walking-stick.

Special costumes, differing considerably from those hitherto described, distinguished the king and the priests. The king wore a long gown, somewhat scantily made, but reaching down to the ankles, elaborately patterned and fringed. Over this, apparently, he had a close-fitting sleeved vest, which came down to the knees, and terminated in a set of heavy tassels. The girdle was worn outside the outer vest, and in war the monarch carried also two cross-belts, which perhaps supported his quiver. The upper vest was, like the under one, richly adorned with embroidery. From it, or from the girdle, depended in front a single heavy tassel attached by a cord, similar to that worn by the early kings of Assyria.

Though tiara of the monarch was very remarkable. It was of great height, nearly cylindrical, but with a slight tendency to swell out toward the crown, which was ornamented with a row of feathers round its entire circumference. The space below was patterned with rosettes, sacred trees, and mythological figures. From the centre of the crown there rose above the feathers a projection resembling in some degree the projection which distinguishes the tiara of the Assyrian kings, the rounded, and not squared, at top. This head-dress, which has a heavy appearance, was worn low on the brow, and covered nearly all the back of the head. It can scarcely have been composed of a heaver material than cloth or felt. Probably it was brilliantly colored.

The monarch wore bracelets, but (apparently) neither necklaces nor earrings. Those last are assigned by Nicolas of Damascus to a Babylonian governor; and they were so commonly used by the Assyrians that we can scarcely suppose them unknown to their kindred and neighbors. The Babylonian monuments, however, contain no traces of earrings as worn by men, and only a few doubtful ones of collars or necklaces; whence we may at any rate conclude that neither

were worn at all generally. The bracelets which encircle the royal wrist resemble the most common bracelet of the Assyrians, consisting of a plain band, probably of metal, with a rosette in the centre.

The dress of the priests was a long robe or gown, flounced and striped, over which they seem to have worn an open jacket of a similar character. A long scarf or ribbon depended from behind down their backs. They carried on their heads an elaborate crown or mitre, which is assigned also to many of the gods. In lieu of this mitre, we find sometimes, though rarely, a horned cap; and, in one or two instances, a mitre of a different kind. In all sacrificial and ceremonial acts the priests seem to have worn their heads covered.

On the subject of the Babylonian military costume our information is scanty and imperfect. In the time of Herodotus the Chaldeans seem to have had the same armature as the Assyrians--namely, bronze helmets, linen breastplates, shields, spears, daggers, and maces or clubs; and, at a considerably earlier date, we find in Scripture much the same arms, offensive and defensive, assigned them. There is, however, one remarkable difference between the Biblical account and that given by Herodotus. The Greek historian says nothing of the use of bows by the Chaldeans; while in Scripture the bow appears as their favorite weapon, that which principally renders them formidable. The monuments are on this point thoroughly in accordance with Scripture. The Babylonian king already represented carries a bow and two arrows. The soldier conducting captives has a bow an arrow, and a quiver. A monument of an earlier date, which is perhaps rather Proto-Chaldean than pure Babylonian, yet which has certain Babylonian characteristics, makes the arms of a king a bow and arrow, a club (?), and a dagger. In the marsh fights of the Assyrians, where their enemies are probably Chaldeans of the low country, the bow is the sole weapon which we see in use.

The Babylonian bow nearly resembles the ordinary curved bow of the Assyrians. It has a knob at either extremity, over which the string passes, and is thicker towards the middle than at the two ends; the bend is slight, the length when strung less than four feet. The length of the arrow is about three feet. It is carefully notched and feathered, and has a barbed point. The quiver, as represented in the Assyrian sculptures, has nothing remarkable about it; but the single extant Babylonian representation makes it terminate curiously with a large ornament resembling a spearhead. It is difficult to see the object of this appendage, which must have formed no inconsiderable addition to the weight of the quiver.

Babylonian daggers were short, and shaped like the Assyrian; but their handles were less elegant and less elaborately ornamented. They were worn in the girdle (as they are at the present day in all eastern countries) either in pairs or singly.

Other weapons of the Babylonians, which we may be sure they used in war, though the monuments do not furnish any proof of the fact, were the spear and the bill or axe. These weapons are exhibited in combination upon one of the most curious of the cylinders, where a lion is disturbed in his meal off an ox by two rustics, one of whom attacks him in front with a spear, while the other seizes his tail and assails him in the rear with an axe. With the axe here represented may be compared another, which is found on a clay tablet brought from Sinkara, and supposed to belong to the early Chaldean period.30 The Sinkara axe has a simple square blade: the axe upon the cylinder has a blade with long curved sides and a curved edge; while, to balance the weight of the blade, it has on the lower side three sharp spikes. The difference between the two implements marks the advance of mechanical art in the country between the time of the first and that of the fourth monarchy.

Babylonian armies seem to have been composed, like Assyrian, of three elements--infantry, cavalry, and chariots. Of the chariots we appear to have one or two representations upon the cylinders, but they are too rudely carved to be of much value. It is not likely that the chariots differed much either in shape or equipment from the Assyrian, unless they were, like those of Susiana, ordinarily drawn by mules. A peculiar car, four-wheeled, and drawn by four horses, with an elevated platform in front and a seat behind for the driver, which the cylinders occasionally exhibit, is probably not a war-chariot, but a sacred vehicle, like the tensa or thensa of the Romans.

The Prophet Habakkuk evidently considered the cavalry of the Babylonians to be their most formidable arm. "They are terrible and dreadful," he said; "from them shall proceed judgment and captivity; their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves; and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly, as the eagle that hasteth to eat." Similarly Ezekiel spoke of the "desirable young men, captains and rulers, great lords and renowned; all of them riding upon horses," Jeremiah couples the horses with the chariots, as if he doubted whether the chariot force or the cavalry were the more to be dreaded. "Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariot shall be as a whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled." In the army of Xerxes the Babylonians seem to have served only on foot, which would imply that they were not considered in that king's time to furnish such good cavalry as the Persians, Medes, Cissians, Indians, and others, who sent contingents of horse. Darius, however, in the Behistun inscription, speaks of Babylonian horsemen; and the armies which overran Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, seem to have consisted mainly of horse. The Babylonian armies, like the Persian, were vast hosts, poorly disciplined, composed not only of native troops, but of contingents from the subject nations, Cissians, Elamites, Shuhites, Assyrians, and others. They marched with vast noise and tumult, spreading themselves far and wide over the country which they were invading, plundering and destroying on all sides. If their enemy would consent to a pitched battle, they were glad to engage with him; but, more usually, their contests resolved themselves into a succession of sieges, the bulk of the population attacked retreating to their strongholds, and offering behind walls a more or less protracted resistance. The weaker towns were assaulted with battering-rams; against the stronger, mounds were raised, reaching nearly to the top of the walls, which were then easily scaled or broken down. A determined persistence in sieges seems to have characterized this people, who did not take Jerusalem till the third, nor Tyre till the fourteenth year.

In expeditions it sometimes happened that a question arose as to the people or country next to be attacked. In such cases it appears that recourse was had to divination, and the omens which were obtained decided whither the next effort of the invader should be directed. Priests doubtless accompanied the expeditions to superintend the sacrifices and interpret them on such occasions. According to Diodorus, the priests in Babylonia were a caste, devoted to the service of the native deities and the pursuits of philosophy, and held in high honor by the people. It was their business to guard the temples and serve at the altars of the gods, to explain dreams and prodigies, to understand omens, to read the warnings of the stars, and to instruct men how to escape the evils threatened in those various ways, by purifications, incantations, and sacrifices. They possessed a traditional knowledge which had come down from father to son, and which none thought of questioning. The laity looked up to them as the sole possessors of a recondite wisdom of the last importance to humanity.

With these statements of the lively but inaccurate Sicilian those of the Book of Daniel are very fairly, if not entirely, in accordance. A class of "wise men" is described as existing at Babylon, foremost among whom are the Chaldeans; they have a special "learning," and (as it would seem) a special "tongue;" their business is to expound dreams and prodigies; they are in high favor with the monarch, and are often consulted by him. This body of "wise men" is subdivided into four classes--"Chaldeans, magicians, astrologers, and soothsayers"--a subdivision which seems to be based upon difference of occupation. It is not distinctly stated that they are priests; nor does it seem that they were a caste; for Jews are enrolled among their number, and Daniel himself is made chief of the entire body. But they form a very distinct order, and constitute a considerable power in the state; they have direct communication with the monarch, and they are believed to possess, not merely human learning, but a supernatural power of predicting future events. High civil office is enjoyed by some of their number.

Notices agreeing with these, but of less importance, are contained in Herodotus and Strabo. Herodotus speaks of the Chaldeans as "priests;" Strabo says that they were "philosophers," who occupied themselves principally in astronomy. The latter writer mentions that they were divided into sects, who differed one from another in their doctrines. He gives the names of several Chaldeans whom the Greek mathematicians were in the habit of quoting. Among them is a Seleucus, who by his name should be a Greek.

From these various authorities we may assume that there was in Babylon, as in Egypt, and in later Persia, a distinct priest class, which enjoyed high consideration. It was not, strictly speaking, a caste. Priests may have generally brought up their sons to the occupation; but other persons, even foreigners (and if foreigners, then _a fortiori_ natives), could be enrolled in the order, and attain its highest privileges. It was at once a sacerdotal and a learned body. It had a literature, written in peculiar language, which its members were bound to study. This language and this literature were probably a legacy from the old times of the first (Turano-Cushite) kingdom, since even in Assyria it is found that the literature was in the main Turanian, down to the very close of the empire. Astronomy, astrology, and mythology were no doubt the chief subjects which the priests studied; but history, chronology, grammar, law, and natural science most likely occupied some part of their attention. Conducting everywhere the worship of the gods, they were of course scattered far and wide through the country; but they had certain special seats of learning, corresponding perhaps in some sort to our universities, the most famous of which were Erech or Orchoe (Warka), and Borsippa, the town represented by the modern Birs-i-Nimrud. They were diligent students, not wanting in ingenuity, and not content merely to hand down the wisdom of their ancestors. Schools arose among them; and a boldness of speculation developed itself akin to that which we find among the Greeks. Astronomy, in particular, was cultivated with a good deal of success; and stores were accumulated of which the Greeks in later times understood and acknowledged the value.

In social position the priest class stood high. They had access to the monarch: they were feared and respected by the people; the offerings of the faithful made them wealthy; their position as interpreters of the divine will secured them influence. Being regarded as capable of civil employment, they naturally enough obtained frequently important offices, which added to their wealth and consideration.

The mass of the people in Babylonia were employed in the two pursuits of commerce and agriculture. The commerce was both foreign and domestic. Great numbers of the Babylonians were engaged in the manufacture of those textile fabrics,

particularly carpets and muslins, which Babylonia produced not only for her own use, but also for the consumption of foreign countries. Many more must have been employed as lapidaries in the execution of those delicate engravings on hard stone, wherewith the seal, which every Babylonian carried, was as a matter of course adorned. The ordinary trades and handicrafts practiced in the East no doubt flourished in the country. A brisk import and export trade was constantly kept up, and promoted a healthful activity throughout the entire body politic. Babylonia is called "a land of traffic" by Ezekiel, and Babylon "a city of merchants." Isaiah says "theory of the Chaldeans" was "in their ships." The monuments show that from very early times the people of the low country on the borders of the Persian Gulf were addicted to maritime pursuits, and navigated the gulf freely, if they did not even venture on the open ocean. And Aeschylus is a witness that the nautical character still attached to the people after their conquest by the Persians; for he calls the Babylonians in the army of Xerxes "navigators of ships."

The Babylonian import trade, so far as it was carried on by themselves, seems to have been chiefly with Arabia, with the islands in the Persian Gulf, and directly or indirectly with India. From Arabia they must have imported the frankincense which they used largely in their religious ceremonies; from the Persian Gulf they appear to have derived pearls, cotton, and wood for walking sticks from India they obtained dogs and several kinds of gems. If we may believe Strabo, they had a colony called Gerrha, most favorably situated on the Arabian coast of the gulf, which was a great emporium, and conducted not only the trade between Babylonia and the regions to the south, but also that which passed through Babylonia into the more northern districts. The products of the various countries of Western Asia flowed into Babylonia down the courses of the rivers. From Armenia, or rather Upper Mesopotamia, came wine, gems, emery, and perhaps stone for building; from Phoenicia, by way of Palmyra and Thapsaeus, came tin, perhaps copper, probably musical instruments, and other objects of luxury; from Media and the countries towards the east came fine wool, lapis-lazuli, perhaps silk, and probably gold and ivory. But these imports seem to have been brought to Babylonia by foreign merchants rather than imported by the exertions of native traders. The Armenians, the Phoenicians, and perhaps the Greeks, used for the conveyance of their goods the route of the Euphrates. The Assyrians, the Paretaceni, and the Medes probably floated theirs down the Tigris and its tributaries.

A large-probably the largest-portion of the people must have been engaged in the occupations of agriculture. Babylonia was, before all things, a grain-producing country--noted for a fertility unexampled elsewhere, and to moderns almost incredible. The soil was a deep and rich alluvium, and was cultivated with the utmost care. It grew chiefly wheat, barley millet, and sesame, which all nourished with wonderful luxuriance. By a skilful management of the natural water supply, the indispensable fluid was utilized to the utmost, and conveyed to every part of the country. Date-groves spread widely over the land, and produced abundance of an excellent fruit.

For the cultivation of the date nothing was needed but a proper water supply, and a little attention at the time of fructification. The male and female palm are distinct trees, and the female cannot produce fruit unless the pollen from the male comes in contact with its blossoms. If the male and the female trees are grown in proper proximity, natural causes will always produce a certain amount of impregnation. But to obtain a good crop, art may be serviceably applied. According to Herodotus, the Babylonians were accustomed to tie the branches of the male to those of the female palm. This was doubtless done at the blossoming time, when it would have the effect he mentions, preventing the fruit of the

female, or date-producing palms, from falling off.

The date palm was multiplied in Babylonia by artificial means. It was commonly grown from seed, several stones being planted together for greater security; But occasionally it was raised from suckers or cuttings. It was important to plant the seeds and cuttings in a sandy soil; and if nature had not sufficiently impregnated the ground with saline particles, salt had to be applied artificially to the soil around as a dressing. The young plants needed a good deal of attention. Plentiful watering was required; and transplantation was desirable at the end of both the first and second year. The Babylonians are said to have transplanted their young trees in the height of summer; other nations preferred the springtime.

For the cultivation of grain the Babylonians broke up their land with the plough; to draw which they seem to have employed two oxen, placed one before the other, in the mode still common in many parts of England. The plough had two handles, which the ploughman guided with his two hands. It was apparently of somewhat slight construction. The tail rose from the lower part of one of the handles, and was of unusual length.

It is certain that dates formed the main food of the inhabitants, The dried fruit, being to them the staff of life, was regarded by the Greeks as their "bread." It was perhaps pressed into cakes, as is the common practice in the country at the present day. On this and goat's milk, which we know to have been in use, the poorer class, it is probable, almost entirely subsisted. Palm-wine, the fermented sap of the tree, was an esteemed, but no doubt only an occasional beverage. It was pleasant to the taste, but apt to leave a headache behind it. Such vegetables as gourds, melons, and cucumbers, must have been cheap, and may have entered into the diet of the common people. They were also probably the consumers of the "pickled bats," which (according to Strabo) were eaten by the Babylonians.

In the marshy regions of the south there were certain tribes whose sole, or at any rate whose chief, food was fish. Fish abound in these districts, and are readily taken either with the hook or in nets. The mode of preparing this food was to dry it in the sun, to pound it fine, strain it through a sieve, and then make it up into cakes, or into a kind of bread.

The diet of the richer classes was no doubt varied and luxurious. Wheaten bread, meats of various kinds, luscious fruits, fish, game, loaded the board; and wine, imported from abroad was the usual beverage. The wealthy Babylonians were fond of drinking to excess; their banquets were magnificent, but generally ended in drunkenness; they were not, however, mere scenes of coarse indulgence, but had a certain refinement, which distinguishes them from the riotous drinking-bouts of the less civilized Modes. Music was in Babylonia a recognized accompaniment of the feast; and bands of performers, entering with the wine, entertained the guests with concerted pieces. A rich odor of perfume floated around, for the Babylonians were connoisseurs in unguents. The eye was delighted with a display of gold and silver plate. The splendid dresses of the guests, the exquisite carpets and hangings, the numerous attendants, gave an air of grandeur to the scene, and seemed half to excuse the excess of which too many were guilty.

A love of music appears to have characterized both the Babylonians and their near neighbors and kinsmen, the Susianians. In the sculptured representations of Assyria, the Susianians are shown to have possessed numerous instruments, and to have organized large bands of performers. The Prophet Daniel and the historian Ctesias similarly witness to the musical taste of the Babylonians, which had much the same character. Ctesias said that Annarus (or

Nannarus), a Babylonian noble, entertained his guests at a banquet with music performed by a company of 150 women. Of these a part sang, while the rest played upon instruments, some using the pipe, others the harp, and a certain number the psaltery. These same instruments are assigned to the Babylonians by the prophet Daniel, who, however, adds to them three more--viz., the horn, the sambuca, and an instrument called the sumphonia, or "symphony." It is uncertain whether the horn intended was straight, like the Assyrian, or curved, like the Roman cornu and lituus. The pipe was probably the double instrument, played at the end, which was familiar to the Susianians and Assyrians. The harp would seem to have resembled the later harp of the Assyrians; but it had fewer strings, if we may judge from a representation upon a cylinder. Like the Assyrian, it was carried under one arm, and was played by both hands, one on either side of the strings.

The character of the remaining instruments is more doubtful. The sambuca seems to have been a large harp, which rested on the ground, like the harps of the Egyptians. The psaltery was also a stringed instrument, and, if its legitimate descendant is the modern santour, we may presume that it is represented in the hands of a Susianian musician on the monument which is our chief authority for the Oriental music of the period. The symphonia is thought by some to be the bagpipe, which is called sampogna by the modern Italians: by others it is regarded as a sort of organ.

The Babylonians used music, not merely in their private entertainments, but also in their religious ceremonies. Daniel's account of their instruments occurs casually in his mention of Nebuchadnezzar's dedication of a colossal idol of gold. The worshippers were to prostrate themselves before the idol as soon as they heard the music commence, and were probably to continue in the attitude of worship until the sound ceased.

The seclusion of women seems scarcely to have been practiced in Babylonia with as much strictness as in most Oriental countries. The two peculiar customs on which Herodotus descants at length--the public auction of the marriageable virgins in all the towns of the empire, and the religious prostitution authorized in the worship of Beltis--were wholly incompatible with the restraints to which the sex has commonly submitted in the Eastern world. Much modesty can scarcely have belonged to those whose virgin charms were originally offered in the public market to the best bidder, and who were required by their religion, at least once in their lives, openly to submit to the embraces of a man other than their husband. It would certainly seem that the sex had in Babylonia a freedom--and not only a freedom, but also a consideration--unusual in the ancient world, and especially rare in Asia. The stories of Semiramis and Nitocris may have in them no great amount of truth; but they sufficiently indicate the belief of the Greeks as to the comparative publicity allowed to their women by the Babylonians.

The monuments accord with the view of Babylonian manners thus opened to us. The female form is not eschewed by the Chaldean artists. Besides images of a goddess (Beltis or Ish-tar) suckling a child, which are frequent, we find on the cylinders numerous representations of women, engaged in various employments. Sometimes they are represented in a procession, visiting the shrine of a goddess, to whom they offer their petitions, by the mouth of one of their number, or to whom they bring their children for the purpose, probably, of placing them under her protection , sometimes they may be seen amusing themselves among birds and flowers in a garden, plucking the fruit from dwarf palms, and politely handing it to one another. Their attire is in every case nearly the same; they wear a long but scanty robe, reaching to the ankles, ornamented at the bottom with a fringe and apparently opening in front. The upper part of the dress passes

over only one shoulder. It is trimmed round the top with a fringe which runs diagonally across the chest, and a similar fringe edges the dress down the front where it opens. A band or fillet is worn round the head, confining the hair, which is turned back behind the head, and tied by a ribbon, or else held up by the fillet.

Female ornaments are not perceptible on the small figures of the cylinders; but from the modeled image in clay, of which a representation has been already given, we learn that bracelets and earrings of a simple character were worn by Babylonian women, if they were not by the men. On the whole, however, female dress seems to have been plain and wanting in variety, though we may perhaps suspect that the artists do not trouble themselves to represent very accurately such diversities of apparel as actually existed.

From a single representation of a priestess it would seem that women of that class wore nothing but a petticoat, thus exposing not only the arms, but the whole of the body as far as the waist.

The monuments throw a little further light on the daily life of the Babylonians. A few of their implements, as saws and hatchets, are represented. ; and from the stools, the chairs, the tables, and stands for holding water-jars which occur occasionally on the cylinders, we may gather that the fashion of their furniture much resembled that of their northern neighbors, the Assyrians. It is needless to dwell on this subject, which presents no novel features, and has been anticipated by the discussion on Assyrian furniture in the first volume. The only touch that can be added to what was there said is that in Babylonia, the chief--almost the sole-material employed for furniture was the wood of the palm-tree, a soft and light fabric which could be easily worked, and which had considerable strength, but did not admit of a high finish.

Chapter 7. Religion

The Religion of the later Babylonians differed in so few respects from that of the early Chaldeans, their predecessors in the same country, that it will be unnecessary to detain the reader with many observations on the subject. The same gods were worshipped in the same temples and with the same rites--the same cosmogony was taught and held--the same symbols were objects of religious regard--even the very dress of the priests was maintained unaltered; and, could Urukh or Chedorlaomer have risen from the grave and revisited the shrines wherein they sacrificed fourteen centuries earlier, they would have found but little to distinguish the ceremonies of their own day from those in vogue under the successors of Nabopolassar. Some additional splendor in the buildings, the idols, and perhaps the offerings, some increased use of music as a part of the ceremonial, some advance of corruption with respect to priestly impostures and popular religious customs might probably have been noticed; but otherwise the religion of Nabonidus and Belshazzar was that of Urukh and Ilgi, alike in the objects and the mode of worship, in the theological notions entertained and the ceremonial observances taught and practiced.

The identity of the gods worshipped during the entire period is sufficiently proved by the repair and restoration of the ancient temples under Nebuchadnezzar, and their re-dedication (as a general rule) to the same deities. It appears also from the names of the later kings and nobles, which embrace among their elements the old divine appellations. Still, together with this general uniformity, we seem to see a certain amount of fluctuation--a sort of fashion in the religion, whereby particular gods were at different times exalted to a higher rank in the Pantheon, and were sometimes even confounded with other deities commonly regarded as wholly distinct from them. Thus Nebuchadnezzar devoted himself in an especial way to Merodach, and not only assigned him titles of honor which

implied his supremacy over all the remaining gods, but even identified him with the great Bel, the ancient tutelary god of the capital. Nabonidus, on the other hand, seems to have restored Bel to his old position, re-establishing the distinction between him and Merodach, and preferring to devote himself to the former.

A similar confusion occurs between the goddesses Beltis and Nana or Ishtar, though this is not peculiar to the later kingdom. It may perhaps be suspected from such instances of connection and quasi-convertibility, that an esoteric doctrine, known to the priests and communicated by them to the kings, taught the real identity of the several gods and goddesses, who may have been understood by the better instructed to represent, not distinct and separate beings, but the several phases of the Divine Nature. Ancient polytheism had, it may be surmised, to a great extent this origin, the various names and titles of the Supreme, which designated His different attributes or the different spheres of His operation, coming by degrees to be misunderstood, and to pass, first with the vulgar, and at last with all but the most enlightened, for the appellations of a number of gods.

The chief objects of Babylonian worship were Bel, Merodach, and Nebo. Nebo, the special deity of Borsippa, seems to have been regarded as a sort of powerful patron-saint under whose protection it was important to place individuals. During the period of the later kingdom, no divine element is so common in names. Of the seven kings who form the entire list, three certainly, four probably, had appellations composed with it. The usage extended from the royal house to the courtiers; and such names as Nebu-zar-adan, Samgar-Nebo, and Nebushazban, show the respect which the upper class of citizens paid to this god. It may even be suspected that when Nebuchadnezzar's Master of the Eunuchs had to give Babylonian names to the young Jewish princes whom he was educating, he designed to secure for one of them this powerful patron, and consequently called him Abed-Nebo--the servant of Nebo--a name which the later Jews, either disdaining or not understanding, have corrupted into the Abed-nogo of the existing text.

Another god held in peculiar honor by the Babylonians was Nergal. Worshipped at Cutha as the tutelary divinity of the town, he was also held in repute by the people generally. No name is more common on the cylinder seals. It is sometimes, though not often, an element in the names of men, as in "Nergal-shar-ezer, the Eab-mag," and (if he be a different person) in Neriglissar, the king.

Altogether, there was a strong local element in the religion of the Babylonians. Bel and Merodach were in a peculiar way the gods of Babylon, Nebo of Borsippa, Nergal of Cutha, the Moon of Ur or Hur, Beltis of Niffer, Hea or Hoa of Hit, Ana of Erech, the Sun of Sippara. Without being exclusively honored at a single site, the deities in question held the foremost place each in his own town. There especially was worship offered to them; there was the most magnificent of their shrines. Out of his own city a god was not greatly respected, unless by those who regarded him as their special personal protector.

The Babylonians worshipped their gods indirectly, through images. Each shrine had at least one idol, which was held in the most pious reverence, and was in the minds of the vulgar identified with the god. It seems to have been believed by some that the actual idol ate and drank the offerings. Others distinguished between the idol and the god, regarding the latter as only occasionally visiting the shrine where he was worshipped. Even these last, however, held gross anthropomorphic views, since they considered the god to descend from heaven in order to hold commerce with the chief priestess. Such notions were encouraged by the priests, who furnished the inner shrine in the temple of Bel with a magnificent couch and a golden table, and made the principal

priestess pass the night in the shrine on certain occasions.

The images of the gods were of various materials. Some were of wood, others of stone, others again of metal; and these last were either solid or plated. The metals employed were gold, silver, brass, or rather bronze, and iron. Occasionally the metal was laid over a clay model. Sometimes images of one metal were overlaid with plates of another, as was the case with one of the great images of Bel, which was originally of silver but was coated with gold by Nebuchadnezzar.

The worship of the Babylonians appears to have been conducted with much pomp and magnificence. A description has been already given of their temples. Attached to these imposing structures was, in every case, a body of priests; to whom the conduct of the ceremonies and the custody of the treasures were entrusted. The priests were married, and lived with their wives and children, either in the sacred structure itself, or in its immediate neighborhood. They were supported either by lands belonging to the temple, or by the offerings of the faithful. These consisted in general of animals, chiefly oxen and goats; but other valuables were no doubt received when tendered. The priest always intervened between the worshipper and the deities, presenting him to them and interceding with uplifted hands on his behalf.

In the temple of Bel at Babylon, and probably in most of the other temples both there and elsewhere throughout the country, a great festival was celebrated once in the course of each year. We know little of the ceremonies with which these festivals were accompanied; but we may presume from the analogy of other nations that there were magnificent processions on these occasions, accompanied probably with music and dancing. The images of the gods were perhaps exhibited either on frames or on sacred vehicles. Numerous victims were sacrificed; and at Babylon it was customary to burn on the great altar in the precinct of Bel a thousand talents' weight of frankincense. The priests no doubt wore their most splendid dresses; the multitude was in holiday costume; the city was given up to merry-making. Everywhere banquets were held. In the palace the king entertained his lords; in private houses there was dancing and reveling. Wine was freely drunk; passion Was excited; and the day, it must be feared, too often terminated in wild orgies, wherein the sanctions of religion were claimed for the free indulgence of the worst sensual appetites. In the temples of one deity excesses of this description, instead of being confined to rare occasions, seem to have been of every-day occurrence. Each woman was required once in her life to visit a shrine of Beltis, and there remain till some stranger cast money in her lap and took her away with him. Herodotus, who seems to have visited the disgraceful scene, describes it as follows. "Many women of the wealthier sort, who are too proud to mix with the others, drive in covered carriages to the precinct, followed by a goodly train of attendants, and there take their station. But the larger number seat themselves within the holy enclosure with wreaths of string about their heads--and here there is always a great crowd, some coming and others going. Lines of cord mark out paths in all directions among the woman; and the strangers pass along them to make their choice. A women who has once taken her seat is not allowed to return home till one of the strangers throws a silver coin into her lap, and takes her with him beyond the holy ground. When he throws the coin, he says these words--'The goddess Mylitta (Beltis) prosper thee.' The silver coin may be of any size; it cannot be refused; for that is forbidden by the law, since once thrown it is sacred. The woman goes with the first man who throws her money, and rejects no one. When she has gone with him, and so satisfied the goddess, she returns home; and from that time forth no gift, however great, will prevail with her. Such of the women as are tall and beautiful are soon released; but others, who are ugly, have to stay a long time before they can fulfill

the law. Some have even waited three or four years in the precinct." The demoralizing tendency of this religious prostitution can scarcely be overrated.

Notions of legal cleanliness and uncleanliness, akin to those prevalent among the Jews, are found to some extent in the religious system of the Babylonians. The consummation of the marriage rite made both the man and the woman impure, as did every subsequent act of the same kind. The impurity was communicated to any vessel that either might touch. To remove it, the pair were required first to sit down before a censer of burning incense, and then to wash themselves thoroughly. Thus only could they re-enter into the state of legal cleanness. A similar impurity attached to those who came into contact with a human corpse. The Babylonians are remarkable for the extent to which they affected symbolism in religion. In the first place they attached to each god a special mystic number, which is used as his emblem and may even stand for his name in an inscription. To the gods of the First Triad-Ami, Bel, and Hea or Hoa--were assigned respectively the numbers 60, 50, and 40; to those of the Second Triad--the Moon, the Sun and the Atmosphere--were given the other integers, 30, 20, and 10 (or perhaps six). To Beltis was attached the number 15, to Nergal 12, to Bar or Nin (apparently) 40, as to Hoa; but this is perhaps doubtful. It is probable that every god, or at any rate all the principle deities, had in a similar way some numerical emblem. Many of these are, however, as yet undiscovered.

Further, each god seems to have had one or more emblematic signs by which he could be pictorially symbolized. The cylinders are full of such forms, which are often crowded into every vacant space where room could be found for them. A certain number can be assigned definitely to particular divinities. Thus a circle, plain or crossed, designates the Sun-god, San or Shamas; a six-rayed or eight-rayed star the Sun-goddess, Gula or Anunit; a double or triple thunderbolt the Atmospheric god, Vul; a serpent probably Hoa; a naked female form Nana or Ishtar; a fish Bar or Nin-ip. But besides these assignable symbols, there are a vast number with regard to which we are still wholly in the dark. Among these may

tree, an ox, a bee, a spearhead. A study of the inscribed cylinders shows these emblems to have no reference to the god or goddess named in the inscription upon them. Each, apparently, represents a distinct deity; and the object of placing them upon a cylinder is to imply the devotion of the man whose seal it is to other deities besides those whose special servant he considers himself. A single cylinder sometimes contains as many as eight or ten such emblems. The principal temples of the gods had special sacred appellations. The great temple of Bel at Babylon was known as Bit-Saggath, that of the same god at Niffer as Kharris-Nipra. that of Beltis at Warka (Erech) as Bit-Ana, that of the sun at Sippara as Bit-Parra, that of Anunit at the same place as Bit-Ulmis, that of Nebo at Borsippa as Bit-Tsida, etc. It is seldom that these names admit of explanation. They had come down apparently from the old Chaldean times, and belonged to the ancient (Turanian) form of speech; which is still almost unintelligible. The Babylonians themselves probably in few cases understood their meaning. They used the words simply as proper names, without regarding them as significant.