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## ARTICLE VIII.

## JONAH IN NINEVEH.

BY H. CLAY TRUMBULL.

*Reprint from the Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. XI. (1892) Part I.*

[We depart from our rule not to publish reprints in the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA, on account both of the intrinsic merits of this paper and to emphasize the importance of taking a broader view of the question at issue than is coming to be current at the present time. The paper deserves a wider circulation than it will get in the Proceedings of the Society.—EDS.]

IN the discussion of the question of the historicity of the book of Jonah, two objections urged against its verity, at various times from the days of Luceian until now,<sup>1</sup> have had weight with many scholars who find no difficulty in accepting as true the Bible record of miracles generally. These objections are: (1) The seeming lack of a sufficient reason for the unique miracle of Jonah's preservation in a great fish. (2) The essential improbability of the instant, reverent heed of an entire people to the simple religious message of an unknown visitor from an enemy's country.

A peculiarity of Bible miracles, that differentiates them from all mere myths and fables and "lying wonders" of any age, is their entire reasonableness as miracles; their clear exhibit of supernaturalness without unnaturalness. When, for instance, God would bring his people out of Egypt with a mighty hand, he does not tell Moses to wave his rod above their heads, in order that, after the fashion of stories in the Arabian Nights, they should be transported through the air and set down in Canaan; but he brings them on foot to the borders of the Yam Suph, where he tells Moses to stretch out his rod over the sea, in order that its waters may divide and make a pathway for the Hebrews; and again to stretch it out in order that the waters may return for the deluging of the Egyptians.

<sup>1</sup> For objections to the historical verity of this book, see P. Friedrichsen, *Kritische Uebersicht der verschiedenen Ansichten von dem Buche Jonas* (Leipzig, 1841); Article on "The Prophet Jonah," by Professor C. E. Stowe, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1853; "Introduction to the Prophet Jonah," by Dr. E. B. Pusey, in his *Minor Prophets*; "Introduction to the Book of Jonah" (Excursus A), by Prebendary Huxtable, in *The [Speaker's] Bible Commentary*; "The Book of Jonah," in *Kalisch's Bible Studies*, Part II., pp. 114-334; Article "Jonah," in *Hackett's Smith's Bible Dictionary*; Article "Jonah," by Professor T. K. Cheyne, in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Ninth edition); "The Book of Jonah considered from an Allegorical Point of View" in C. H. H. Wright's *Biblical Essays*.

So, again, the ten "strokes," or miraculous "plagues," wrought for the bringing of Pharaoh to release God's captive people, are successive strokes at the gods of Egypt, beginning with a stroke at the popular river-god, and passing on and up to a stroke at the royal sun-god in the heavens, and terminating with a stroke at the first-born, or priestly representative of the gods, in every household of Egypt, "from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon the throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the [consecrated] first-born of cattle." The miraculous strokes are, in the light of later Egyptian disclosures, seen to be a reasonable, although a supernatural, exhibit of the supremacy of the God of the Hebrews over the boasted gods of Egypt, rather than a reasonless display of divine power.

Similarly the miracles of the four Gospels differ from those of the Apocryphal Gospels, in the simplicity of their reasonable supernaturalness, as contrasted with the irrational unnaturalness of their spurious imitations. In the one case the miracle is a reasonable exercise of supernatural power, for the increase of food, for the healing of disease, for the restoration of life, for the quieting of the disturbed elements of nature. In the other case the miracle is a silly marvel of making clay figures walk or fly, and of killing naughty boys by a word or a wish.

Where, in the Old Testament or the New, except in the book of Jonah, is there such a seemingly unnecessary miracle as the saving of a man's life by having him swallowed in a fish, instead, say, of having the vessel that carried him driven back by contrary winds to the place of its starting? Where else is there a story of the instant turning of a great multitude from self-seeking to God-seeking, by the words of a single strange speaker, without even the intervehion of an obvious miracle in enforcement of the speaker's message, as at the time of Belshazzar's feast, or at the day of Pentecost? Is it, indeed, to be wondered at, in this view of the case, that a writer like Professor Cheyne<sup>1</sup> should say concerning the historicity of the book of Jonah: "From a purely literary point of view it has been urged that 'the marks of a story [of an imaginary story] are as patent in the book of Jonah as in any of the tales of the Thousand and One Nights;'" and again, that "the greatest of the improbabilities [in this case] is a moral one; can we conceive of a large heathen city being converted by an obscure foreign prophet?"

Just here it is well to ask if there is anything in the modern disclosures of Assyrian life and history that would seem to render the miraculous element in the story of Jonah more reasonable, and the marvellous effect of his preaching at Nineveh more explicable and natural. And it seems to me that certain well-known facts in these disclosures have not been brought into their fair relations with reference to this question.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Article "Jonah," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Ninth edition).

<sup>2</sup>No claim is made by the writer for any discovery of fresh facts bearing on this question; but only for a novel use of familiar facts, as throwing light upon the question.

Prominent among the divinities of ancient Assyria, as shown by the monuments, was Dagan, a creature, part man and part fish. The divinity was in some instances represented as an upright figure, with the head of a fish above the head of a man, the open mouth of the fish forming a miter as the man's sacred head-dress, and the feet of a man extending below the tail of the fish. In other cases, the body of a man was at right angles to the conjoined body of a fish. Images of this fish-god have been found guarding the entrance to palace and temple in the ruins of Nineveh, and they appear upon ancient Babylonian seals, in a variety of forms.<sup>1</sup> The name Dagan is found in the cuneiform inscriptions at an early date. Tiglathpileser I. mentions an ancient ruler of Assyria under the name of Ishme-Dagan, who preceded him by six hundred and forty-one years, which would indicate a period of about 1840 B. C.;<sup>2</sup> and another Ishme-Dagan, a Babylonian king, lived still earlier than the Assyrian ruler.<sup>3</sup>

That this fish-god Dagan was an object of reverent worship in early Babylon and Assyria, is clear from the monuments. Berosus, a Babylonian historian, writing in the fourth century before our era, records the early traditions concerning the origin of this worship. According to the various fragments of Berosus, preserved in later historical writers,<sup>4</sup> the very beginning of civilization in Chaldea and Babylonia was under the direction of a personage, part man and part fish, who came up out of the sea. According to the account of this tradition given from Berosus by Apollodorus, "the whole body of the animal was like that of a fish; and had under a fish's head another head, and also feet below, similar to those of a man, subjoined to the fish's tail. His voice, too, and language were articulate and human; and a representation of him is preserved even to this day. This being used to converse with men in the day time, but took no food at that season; and he gave them an insight into letters, and sciences, and every kind of art. He taught them to construct houses, to found temples, to compile laws, and explained to them the principles of geometrical knowledge. He made them distinguish the seeds of the earth, and showed them how to collect fruits. In short, he instructed them in everything which could tend to soften manners and humanize mankind. From that time, so universal were his instructions, nothing material has been added by way of improvement. When the sun set, it was the custom of this being to plunge again into the sea, and abide all night in the deep; for he was amphibious."

Berosus also records that from time to time, ages apart, other beings of like nature with this first great teacher, came up out of the sea with fresh instructions for mankind; and that each one of these avatars, or incarnations, marked a new epoch, and the supernatural messenger bore a new name. So

<sup>1</sup> See Layard's *Nineveh and its Remains*, II., 353 f.; *Nineveh and Babylon*, 292-295, 301 f.

<sup>2</sup> See *Records of the Past* (new series), I., 117.

<sup>3</sup> See Tiele's *Babylonisch-Assyrische Geschichte*, p. 143 f.

<sup>4</sup> See Cory's *Ancient Fragments* (Hodge's edition), pp. 43-69.

it would seem to be clear that, in all those days of Israel's history within which the book of Jonah can fairly be assigned, the people of Nineveh were believers in a divinity who from time to time sent messages to them by a personage who rose out of the sea, as part fish and part man. This being so, is there not a perceptible reasonableness, or logical consistency of movement, in the narrated miracle of Jonah in the fish, and of the wonderful success of the fish-ejected Jonah as a preacher in the Assyrian capital?

What better heralding, as a divinely sent messenger to Nineveh, could Jonah have had, than to be thrown up out of the mouth of a great fish, in the presence of witnesses, say, on the coast of Phœnicia, where the fish-god was a favorite object of worship? Such an incident would have inevitably aroused the mercurial nature of Oriental observers, so that a multitude would be ready to follow the seemingly new avatar of the fish-god, proclaiming the story of his uprising from the sea, as he went on his mission to the city where the fish-god had its very centre of worship.<sup>1</sup> And who would wonder that, when it was heard in Nineveh that the new prophet among them had come from the very mouth of a fish in the sea, to bring them a divinely sent warning,<sup>2</sup> all the people "from the greatest of them even to the least of them" should be ready to heed the warning, and to take steps to avert the impending doom proclaimed by him?<sup>3</sup>

In short, if the book of Jonah is to be looked upon as veritable history, it is clear, in the light of Assyrian records and Assyrian traditions, that there was a sound reason for having Jonah swallowed by a fish in order to his coming up out of a fish; and that the recorded sudden and profound alarm of the people of an entire city at his warning was most natural, as a result of the

<sup>1</sup> The landing place of Jonah is not named in the Bible narrative, nor is its location essential to the explanation here suggested. As he was to go from it—wherever it was—to Nineveh, the Orientals who witnessed his landing could go with him.

<sup>2</sup> It is not said in the Bible record that Jonah spoke in the name of *Jehovah* to the people of Nineveh; although it is said that it was "the word of Jehovah" which came to him as he was sent thither (Jonah i. 1; iii. 1). The record is that "the people of Nineveh believed God"; and that, because of their repentance, "God repented of the evil which he said he would do to them, and he did it not" (Jonah iii. 5-10). All this is consistent with the idea that, while Jonah came to the Ninevites as the representative of God whom he knew as Jehovah, the Ninevites were ready to hear him as the representative of the god whom they called Dagan. A suggestion made by Sir Henry Rawlinson (see "Essay X." in his *History of Herodotus*, Vol. I., p. 482), as to the meaning of the term Dagan, is worthy of note just here. It is, that Da-Gan stands for the male, and Da-las for the female, the two titles seeming to have "appertained to the great gods Belus and Beltis." In the light of this suggestion, a message from Dagan would have been to the Assyrians a message from Bel—the Lord. Compare on this point Jensen, *Kosmologie*, p. 449 ff.

<sup>3</sup> The Bible story of the repentance of a whole people, and of their signs of repentance, at the call of their king, is entirely in accord with the historical records of Oriental peoples and sovereigns, in cases where the ruler was moved by fear or grief.

coincidence of this miracle with their religious beliefs and expectations. Hence these two stock arguments against the historicity of the book of Jonah no longer have the force that they have seemed to possess.<sup>1</sup>

There is another point in the record of Berosus that has a possible bearing on the story of Jonah at Nineveh. Berosus gives the name of the Assyrian fish-god as "Oannes," while he mentions the name "Odacon" as that of one of the avatars of Oannes.<sup>2</sup> Now, as the name Dagan appears frequently in the Assyrian records, from their earlier dates, and no trace has been found in them of the name "Oannes," or anything like it, the question suggests itself,—Is there in this name Oannes any reference to Jonah, as the supposed manifestation of the fish-god himself?

While "Oannes" is not the precise equivalent of the name "Jonah," it is a form that might naturally have been employed by Berosus, while writing in Greek, if he desired to give an equivalent of "Jonah."<sup>3</sup> And if it were a literal fact that a man called "Yonah" had come up out of the very mouth of a fish in the sea, claiming to be a messenger of the great God to the people of Nineveh, and had been accepted by king and people accordingly, is it not reasonable to suppose that Berosus, writing after that event, would connect the name Jonah with the primal divinity of Nineveh? And is there not in these disclosures of the Assyrian monuments, and of the later Babylonian historian, incidental proof of the naturalness of the narrative of Jonah at Nineveh, whether that narrative be looked upon as a plain record of facts, or as an inspired story of what might have been facts?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Whatever other arguments may have force against the historical verity of this book, it is evident that that objection which is characterized by so eminent a critic as Professor Cheyne as "the greatest of the improbabilities" of the narrative, is here shown to be of no force whatsoever. Lesser objections must, therefore, be relied on for the remission of the story to the realm of myth.

<sup>2</sup> See Cory's Ancient Fragments, pp. 51-58.

<sup>3</sup> This name *Oannes*, as it stands in the Greek of Berosus, appears in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, with the addition of *I* before it—*Ioannes*. In the Septuagint this Greek word *Ioannes* is used to represent both the Hebrew name *Yohanan*, and the Hebrew name *Yona*. (Compare 2 Kings xxv. 23 [*Iona*] and 1 Chronicles iii. 24 [*Ioanan*], where the Hebrew in both passages has *Yohanan*.) Similarly, in the New Testament, the name *Jonah* is rendered both *Jonas* and *Ioannes*. (Compare John i. 42 and xxi. 15, with Matthew xvi. 17.) Professor Dr. Hermann V. Hilprecht, the eminent Assyriologist, informs me that in the Assyrian inscriptions the *Y* of foreign words becomes *I*, or disappears altogether; hence *Joannes*, as the Greek representative of *Yona*, would appear in Assyrian either as *Ioannes* or as *Oannes*. Therefore, in his opinion, *Oannes* would be a regular Greco-Babylonian writing for *Jonah*.

<sup>4</sup> A suggestion of the possible relation of *Oannes* and "Jonah" was made by Professor F. C. Baur, as early as 1837, in the *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* (Heft. I. pp. 88-114), and it has been many times repeated since then; but the mistake, in every case, has been that of supposing, or of taking it for granted, that the name *Oannes* appears in Assyrian story earlier than the date of Jonah. Hence the attempt has been made to derive Jonah

It would certainly seem to be true that, if God desired to impress upon all the people of Nineveh the authenticity of a message from himself, while leaving to themselves the responsibility of a personal choice as to obeying or disregarding his message, he could not have employed a fitter method than by sending that message to them in a way calculated to meet their most reverent and profound conceptions of a divinely authorized messenger. And this divine concession—as it might be called—to the needs and aspirations of a people of limited religious training, would be in accordance with all that we know of God's way of working among men; as shown, for example, in his meeting of Joseph in Egypt through the divining cup, and of the Chaldeans through their searching of the stars.

In addition to this trace of the name Jonah, as connected with Assyria in the writings of Berossus, the preservation of that name at the ruins of Nineveh would seem to indicate, or to confirm a historic basis for this connection. It has been customary to account for the existence of that name at that site, by the carrying of it thither by the Muhammadans in the Middle Ages. But how was it that the early Muhammadans accurately located that site, which had been so utterly lost to human knowledge that when Xenophon's army passed the ruins of the capital of Assyria, a century before Berossus, no trace of the name or fame of Nineveh as Nineveh seemed to remain there?<sup>1</sup>

from *Oannes*, instead of *Oannes* from Jonah. It is of interest, however, to note that the apparent identification of Jonah with the Oannes of Berossus was observed by so fearless a critic as Baur, when approaching the subject from his point of view. Notwithstanding all the efforts of Assyriologists to identify Oannes with a Babylono-Assyrian divinity of the cuneiform inscriptions, so far nothing (as I am informed by Professor Dr. Hilprecht) beyond questionable hypotheses has been arrived at. Lenormant (*Chaldean Magic*, p. 202 ff.) sees in Oannes the god Ea (Oannes—Ea-han). Tiele, who identified Oannes with Anu (in his *Vergl. Geschiedenis*, p. 302 ff.), accepted Lenormant's view (in his *Historie Comparée des Religions Anciennes de l'Égypte et des Peuples Sémitiques*, p. 190 f.). But later (in his *Babylonisch-Assyrische Geschichte*, p. 535, note 5) he expresses serious doubts as to the correctness of Lenormant's view, and asks the question whether Oannes could represent a Babylonian *Ea-vannu*. Yet he is unable to say what this name could mean. Schrader does not offer anything better (in his *Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, 2nd edition, p. 284). Hommel's suggestion, that the myth of Oannes or Euhanes (the Ea-bani of the Nimrod epic?) represents a North Babylonian tradition, is fanciful. (Compare his *Die Semitischen Völker und Sprachen*, pp. 355 and 488.) Jensen, in his *Kosmologie der Babylonier*, with all its researches in Babylonian mythology, abstains from any attempt at an etymology of Oannes. But if it be once admitted that the Bible story of Jonah has a basis of fact, and that Berossus, writing after its day, spoke of Jonah as the supposed latest avatar of Dagan, all the hopeless tangle of mystery on this point is at once unravelled.

<sup>1</sup> See Anabasis, Book III., § 4. Herodotus, at an earlier date than Xenophon, speaks of the Tigris as "the river upon which the town of Nineveh formerly stood" (*History*, Book I., § 193); and this was (say) a century and a half after the destruction of the capital of Assyria. The idea that Muhammadans or Christians were enabled by their instinct or through a miraculous attainment of knowledge, a dozen centuries after that time, to locate in the desert the site of the city where Jonah preached, is more improbable than anything in the book of Jonah.

As soon, however, as modern discoverers unearched the mound that had for long centuries—perhaps from the days of Nineveh's destruction<sup>1</sup>—been known by the name of Neby Yunas, they found beneath it the ruined palaces of kings of Nineveh.<sup>2</sup>

These facts are not in themselves conclusive as to the question of the historicity of the book of Jonah; but surely they ought not to be ignored by scholars who are discussing that question.

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that the name "Yunas," or "Jonah," at this site, was a survival of the tradition that a divinity of that name there appeared to the Ninevites (as indicated by Berosus). It is a well-known fact that the name of a local divinity adheres with wonderful persistency to its locality, in the East.

<sup>2</sup> See Layard's *Nineveh and its Remains*, and *Nineveh and Babylon*; Buckingham's *Travels in Mesopotamia*, II., 50-52.