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BRIEF COMMUNICATION

Cherubim

WHEN in 1880 Lenormant (*Les Origines de l'Histoire*, I, 118) claimed to have found on an ancient talisman the inscription: "*kirubu damku*" (a reading where the wish was father to the thought), scholars began to discuss the Babylonian origin of the biblical Cherubim. On the one hand, Delitzsch (*Wo lag das Paradies?*, 150 ff.) and Zimmern (*KAT*³ 529 f.; 631 f.) maintained the identity of the Cherubim with the Assyrian lion and bull colossi; on the other, most scholars refused to adopt this view. As long as the Assyrian texts yielded no word of the same root and with a similar meaning, the discussion could lead to no results. Three Assyrian texts, which have been published since 1911, contain such a word and permit a restatement of the question on more solid foundations.

The first one is an account of Esarhaddon's restoration of the Aššur temple built by Šalmaneser (Messerschmidt, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur historischen Inhalts: WVDOG* xvi, No. 75; cf. Meissner, *OLZ* 14, 476; Waterman, *AJSL* 31, 251). After rebuilding the old structure, Esarhaddon made gates of fragrant cypress (covered with gold plating) and doors for the shrine of Ašur embossed with gold, and put them in place. His account adds: "A *Laḥmu* and a *Kuribi* of brilliant *šariru* I set up side by side (of the gate)" (*uḫlaḥmu uḫku-ri-bi ša šariri ruššu idi ana idi u[l-z]iz: obv. 24*).

The second text is Harper, *Letters*, No. 1194 (cf. Klauber, *AJSL* 30, 273): "Two statues of the mighty kings, 50 statues of *ku-ri-bi*, statues of clay, of silver, 3 thresholds of silver, one *rukku* of silver: this work (?) is done" (obv. 13—15).

The third text is Harper, *Letters*, No. 1413, whose defective state makes it unintelligible to me; although it yields no connected sense it is very significant in this connection: obv. 3: the statues of the gods of the city [...] 4: Ištar etc. 8: *ku-ri-bi* [...] rev. 1 the mighty Lamassu etc.

It appears from these texts that the *Kuribi* belonged to the class of the Lamassu and the Lahmu, without being identical with either. Like the winged bull and lion colossi, it was represented both in colossal form and placed at the door of the temples, and in miniature replicas manufactured by the dozen. Botta found small copies of the statues of protecting spirits (*Monument de Ninive*, Table 153).

In the Old Testament the Cherubim had wings (Ex. 25 20; 1 Ki. 6 24-27 et passim), one face (apparently human) (Ex. 25 20), human hands (Ez. 1 8; 10 7, 8, 21); they were connected with the Tree of Life (Gen. 3 24) and with the palm trees and open blossoms carved on the walls of Solomon's temple (1 Ki. 6 29; 7 29, 36) and of the ideal temple described by Ezekiel (41 18-20).

Assyrian sculpture furnishes numerous representations of a divine being with human figure and wings. Botta found such protecting spirits standing at the gate of the palace on both sides of the bull colossi (*Monument de Ninive*, Tables 30 and 42); we see them, with pine cones in the right hand, fertilizing the sacred tree (e. g. Gressmann, *Texte und Bilder*, ii, 83). The identification of these angelic beings with the Cherubim seems inevitable and, although the documentary proof is lacking, their name must have been *ku-ri-bi*. The root of *kuribi* and, ultimately, of cherubim, seems to be the Assyrian *karābu*. (to bless): these blessing or protecting spirits were akin to the guardian angels. They were represented with one hand lifted in the act of blessing (Ball, *Light from the East*, p. 33). Guardian angels were not unknown to the Assyrians, for in a number of letters (Harper, *Letters* 113 (*sic!*), 427, 453, 778, 779, 1133) we find the wish: "May the gods appoint at the side of the king a guardian of peace and life" (*mašar šulmi balāti*) (cf. Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel*, i, 69; Behrens, *Assyrische Babylonische Briefe*, 40⁴).