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BABYLONIAN PARALLELS TO THE SONG OF SONGS

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IN an article recently published, "Canticles and the Tammuz Cult,"¹ I pointed out a few of the many Greek, Egyptian and Babylonian parallels to Canticles, of which the most striking is probably the text published by Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, Heft IV, No. 158. At the time of writing my earlier article I had access only to Barton's partial translation² and had not seen the original copy. Barton translates the text as a single hymn, but it is rather a catalog of a large collection of hymns and liturgies. Accordingly, instead of having one parallel to Canticles we have many, but unfortunately we have the first lines only and not the complete texts. Enough is given, however, to indicate the decided similarity between Canticles and these *irtu*-songs, as they are called.

The text is a difficult one. Ebeling³ had attempted a partial translation before Barton, and more recently Langdon⁴ has essayed another. That three representative Assyriologists of three different countries should differ so radically in their translations is surprising and not a little disconcerting. I venture to add still another translation, which differs considerably from the others, but is, I trust, more faithful to the original. I give

¹ *AJSL*, XXXIX, 1-14, since elaborated by another article, "Canticles and the Fertility Cult," to be published presently by the Oriental Club of Philadelphia in *A Symposium on the Song of Songs*.

² *Archaeology and the Bible*, 3rd edition, pp. 464 ff.

³ *MDOG*, No. 58, pp. 49 f.

⁴ *JBAS*, 1921, pp. 183 ff.

here only those lines that are pertinent to our purpose, viz. Rev., Col. II, which is strictly Col. III, since the columns on the reverse ought to be numbered in the opposite order from that given by Ebeling, his Col. I giving a summary of the contents of the whole tablet and hence being the last column of the text. From this column, lines 45 ff., we learn that there was a goodly number of songs in the catalog of Col. II, but the exact number has not been preserved. Col. II, however, retains the first lines of 51 of them, a few partly broken. They are called *irātu*, plural of *irtu* (Sumerian, *gab*). This term Langdon takes as meaning secular love-songs, but they are rather religious songs connected with the Tammuz-Ishtar cult, as Ebeling and Barton have already noted. This is indicated by the direct reference to Nana (Ishtar) in line 38, by the religious character of the catalog in general, and by the whole tenor of the songs themselves. The word *irtu* is ordinarily used of the male breast, but it is also used of the female.⁵ It is frequently used of mother earth and of the underworld and would seem to have that connotation here. Other words are used for the human breast.

KAR, IV, No. 158, Rev., Col. II

1. [ap]-lu-us-ka-ma
I beheld thee (*masc.*) and
2. up-ḥa ki-i kakkab bu-[ru-me(?)].
Shine out like a star of the sky!
3. i-na ṣi-iḥ-ti ṣa ṣi-e-k[a].⁶
In a dirge over thy (*masc.*) death.⁷
4. an-nu-u ṣi-bu-tu ṣa ḥu-du ka-bat-ti.
This is the desire that rejoiceth my heart (*lit.* liver).

⁵ So Holma, *Körperteile*, pp. 44 ff., as against Langdon, *loc. cit.*, p. 188.

⁶ From the root *ṣu*, "to destroy," Delitzsch, *HWB*, 565b, and not the hypothetical *ṣu* of Langdon, *loc. cit.*, p. 188, note 2. Cf. *ṣi-i ṣam-ṣi* = *erib ṣamši*, i. e. "destruction (setting) of the sun," *CT*, XVIII, 80, Col. IV, 21 f.

⁷ The reference here is to the death of Tammuz, the symbol of vegetation. For the same idea in Canticles, see my articles quoted above.

5. *ip-šu pi-i-ka at-mu balāti-ia šum-me-ḥa-ni-ma.*
The utterance of thy (*masc.*) mouth is the word of my life; prosper thou me!⁹
6. *napḥar 23 i-ra-a-tu ša e-šir-te.*⁹
A total of 23 *irtu*-songs for the decachord.¹⁰
7. *ki-e ši-ḥa-a-ku a-na na-aḥ-ši.*¹¹
How I do long for the bountiful one!
8. *ū-um e-en im-ni-ia iš-ḥi-ṭa-an-ni.*
The day that the lord of my right hand embraced me.
9. *i li-ki a-ma-aṣ-ši*¹² *a-na ma-a-ri.*¹³
Come, take me! I give welcome to the son.¹⁴
10. *ma-te-ma be-lu te-ru-ba i-na-an-na.*
At any time, O lord, thou mayest enter now.
11. *ḥi-i-pa-a-ku a-na da-di-ka.*
I am pressed to thy (*masc.*) breast.
12. *it-ti šim-ta-a-at*¹⁵ *mu-ši-ti.*
With the fates of night.
13. *šumu-u ša ma-a-ru šamma šam-ša-a-ku.*¹⁶
By the name of the son I revive(?) the vegetation.¹⁷

⁹ Clearly a reference to Tammuz, the life-giving god. The same idea is frequent in Canticles; see my articles quoted above.

¹⁰ On this see Langdon, *loc. cit.*, p. 183.

¹¹ Of these 23 songs only the first lines of the five given above have been preserved.

¹² I. e., Tammuz; cf. Obr., II, 7: *a-na na-aḥ-ši emšir-ši a-pa-ia-aḥ*, "I long for the bountiful one, the shepherd."

¹³ Literally, "I spread (the feet;)" cf. Ez. 16 25 and the Hebrew word שָׁפַף, "concupine," Cant. 6 8, 9, evidently a derivative from שָׁפַף, "to divide, spread," the שָׁ being originally the fem. ending נ.

¹⁴ The regular appellation of Tammuz in the liturgies and an element in his name, *Dumu-si*, "true son."

¹⁵ A reference to the marriage and union of Tammuz and Ishtar to the end that there might be a revival of life in nature; so also lines 10, 11, 16, 50 below; cf. Cant. 1 2 ff.; 2 6; 4 10; 7 12 ff.; 8 1 ff.

¹⁶ False pl. of *šimtu*. We have a reference here to the death of Tammuz, as in line 8 above; cf. the Babylonian expression for dying, *aldu ana šimat māti*, "to go to the fate of night," i. e. to the underworld where all is dark.

¹⁷ From *šamšū*, found only here; the root probably of *šamšu*, "sun."

¹⁸ Cf. one of the titles of Tammuz, *Ab-š* "father of vegetation," Zimmern, *Der babylonische Gott Tammuz*, p. 8; Langdon, *Tammuz and Ishtar*, p. 8.

14. *a am-mar ša-ma-an irši-ti.*
Ah, I behold the fat¹⁸ of the land.
15. *ū-mu ub-la bu-su-ra-tu-ma hu-ud lib-bi.*
The day bringeth gladness, even joy of the heart.¹⁹
16. *e-la-ia²⁰ ma-a-ru lu na-me-ir²¹ ir-ba.*
Upon me may the son beam; come thou in!
17. *la-a me-ḥi-ir-ti iš-nu-na-an-ni.*
Not a rival (*fem.*) equalled me.
18. *"ni-ip-pu-ri-ti^{21a} la-ḥa-na-tu da-šu-up-tu.*
My Nippurite is a jar of sweetness.
19. *šu-up-pi hu-ul-li.²²*
Be joyous, be happy!
20. *da-am-ša-aš-ni²³ be-la-ni.*
Thou hast caressed me; be thou my lord!
21. *sa-am-mu-ut e-ri-ni ra-am-ka be-lu.*
The fragrance of cedar²⁴ is thy love, O lord.
22. *a-na bāb e-ni ta-al-li-ka²⁵ am-ma.*
To the door of the lord²⁶ she did come.

¹⁸ I. e. "fertility;" cf. Heb. *רָפָא*, from the root "to be fat, fertile." Cf. Isa. 5:1 (like Canticles originally belonging to the fertility cult) and Cant. 1:5, "The fat of *turak* (cf. Babyl. *tarruku*, apparently some kind of plant used for incense) is thy name (i. e. thy being); therefore do the maidens (votaries) love thee."

¹⁹ A sentiment frequent in the Tammuz liturgies and in Canticles. The reference is to the joy occasioned by the revival of life and vegetation in the world.

²⁰ A variant of *est*, not the prep. *elā* as Langdon, *ad. loc.*

²¹ Not Piel, as Langdon, but simple Perm. with *lā* precativa.

^{21a} I. e. Ishtar, cf. *BA*, XII, 82, 43 where Ishtar is called "the queen of Nippur."

²² Cf. line 88 below; Rev. III, 6: *ḥu-di-i be-li-it-ni šu-li-ti*, "Rejoice, O our lady (i. e. Ishtar), make song;" *KAB*, III, No. 144, Rev. 1: *ḥu-di-i u ri-ti*, "Rejoice and jubilate," likewise addressed to Ishtar. In Canticles cf. 1:4; 2:12, discussed in my articles quoted above.

²³ For *tamšāš*, Prt. of *mašāšu*, on which see Langdon, *loc. cit.*, p. 186, note 11.

²⁴ The cedar is everywhere connected with the fertility cult and appears in Cant. 1:17.

²⁵ Ebeling has *al*, manifestly an error for *ka*.

²⁶ I. e. in the netherworld, whither the goddess, Ishtar, was thought to go in search of her lord, Tammus. The netherworld is frequently

23. *a-na mu-ši-ti an-ni-ti a-na li-la-ti an-na-ti.*
 For this night, for these evenings.
24. *naphar 17 i-ra-a-tu ša ki-it-me.*²⁷
 A total of 17 *irtu*-songs for the *kitmu*-instrument.
25. *ki-e na-aḫ-ša-at ki-e nam-ra-at.*
 How gorgeous she is; how resplendent she is!
26. *i-še'*²⁸ *as-ma kirā*²⁹ *la-li-ka.*
 She seeketh out the beautiful garden of thy (*masc.*)
 abundance.
27. *ū-ma lib-bi me-lu-la ni-gu-ta.*
 Today my heart is joy (and) gladness.
28. *a ri-id kirā šarri ḫa-ši-bu e-ri-ni.*
 O, come down to the garden of the king (which) reeks
 with cedar.³⁰
29. *at-ta ma-a-ru ra-i-mu da-di-ni.*
 Thou, O son, art a lover of my bosom.
30. *e-bir-tu nāri a-lu me-li-li.*³¹
 On the other side of the river³² is the city of lamentation.

represented as the house of Tammuz; see, e. g., Meissner, *SAI*, 3292, where it is called *bīt dūmu-si*, "house of Tammuz;" cf. II R. 61, No. 1, 18, *ē a-ra-li*, "house of the underworld;" and *BE*, XXVII, No. 1, IV, 40, where Tammuz is called *dīgir-si ē a-ra-li-ka*, "bridegroom of the house of the underworld." In Canticles cf. 24, "Bring me to the house of wine and look upon me with love."

²⁷ On this see Langdon, *loc. cit.*, p. 184, note 2.

²⁸ Literally, "he seeketh," but manifestly *masc.* for *fem.*, as is frequent in Babylonian, and is likewise characteristic of Canticles, see Cannon, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 142 ff.

²⁹ Manifestly the netherworld to which Tammuz has gone, *kirā* being one of the many names applied to the netherworld; see, e. g., Zimmern, *Sumerische Kultlieder*, No. 26, VII, 4, 6; and cf. Albright, *AJSL*, XXXVI, 290 ff.; Radan, *Sumerian Hymns and Prayers to God Dūmu-si* (*BE*, Series A, XXX, Part I), pp. 19 ff., 52 f. Below cf. lines 28 and 35 and in Canticles cf. 6 a, on which see note in the second of my articles quoted above.

³⁰ Cf. Cant. 4 16. "King" in Canticles, as in the vegetation liturgies the world over, is the title regularly applied to the vegetation god. In early Babylonia, when kings were deified, they were nearly always thought of as forms of the vegetation god, probably because they were mortal even as he was mortal.

³¹ From the root *ēliw*, "to make music," from which comes another

31. *aš-ru un-ni*³³ *ta-gu-ša araḥ ši-ḥa-ti*³⁴
To the place of sorrow thou (*masc.*) didst go in the
month of lamentation.³⁵
32. *ul-la a-li-ik ma-a-ru*
Joyously come, O son!³⁶
33. *ki-i za-ra-at*³⁷ *ša at-ḥa-at-ti*
Like the pavilion of the maidens.³⁸
34. *iš-ṣur aladi ti-id-ku*³⁹ *ur-ri lal-la-ru ri-gim-ki*
O bird of child-bearing, harbinger of light, honey is thy
(*fem.*) voice.⁴⁰
35. *ša-an-da-ba-ak kirt ši-ḥa-ti*
O watchman of the garden of lamentation.⁴¹

derivative, *maḫḫu*, "flute." Both words are regularly used in connection with the liturgical wailing over the death of Tammuz; e. g. *Descent of Ishtar*, Rev. 56 f.

³³ I. e. the river Hubur, the mythical river of the underworld. With the Babylonians, as with most peoples, there was a river or sea separating this world from the next.

³⁴ Piel Inf. of *עָנָה*, Heb. *עָנָה*, "to lament." For *ašru unni* — the netherworld, cf. Zimmer, *Sumerische Kultlieder*, No. 26, VI, 37, *ki sir-ra*, "place of lamentation," a name of the netherworld.

³⁵ Against the translations of Ebeling, Barton and Langdon *šihḫu*, pl. *šihḫti*, is the technical word in Babyl. for "lamentation" (Sum. *isiš*), and the context here and elsewhere in the text indicates this clearly as its meaning.

³⁶ I. e. the fourth month, "the month of Tammuz," earlier called "the month of the festival of Tammuz," when there was liturgical wailing for the dying god, the symbol of the waning of life in nature.

³⁷ A phrase very frequent in Canticles, e. g. 2 17; 7 12; 8 14; cf. 2 10, 12; 4 8.

³⁸ Cf. the *zarātu* (Sum. *dūr*, the root meaning of which is "to dwell"), "stateroom, pavilion," on the procession-ship of Marduk in which in the rôle of Tammuz he was carried in the New Year's festival to be united in marriage with the mother goddess, *East India House Inscription*, IV, 4; *Wadi Brisa Inscription*, III, 26, 37; cf. also Cant. 1 12, 17; 3 7 ff.

³⁹ I. e. the Ishtar votaries; cf. "the maidens" so frequently referred to in Canticles.

⁴⁰ Evidently a derivative of *diku*, "to set in motion." The reference is to Ishtar. A striking parallel in Canticles is 2 14.

⁴¹ A sentiment frequent in Canticles; e. g. 2 14; 4 11; 5 1.

⁴² The Babylonians, like most peoples, thought of the underworld as guarded by watchmen; see, e. g., *Descent of Ishtar*, Obv. 49 ff. In Canticles cf. 3 3; 5 7; 8 12.

- 36, 37. *ū-um-uš(?) i-na a¹la-ar-sa-an ši-ḥa-tu i-si-ka.*
Every day in Larsa lamentation abounds.⁴²
38. *ri-i-ši a²na-na-a i-na ki³ri e-babbar ša ta-ra-mi.*
Rejoice, O Nana,⁴³ in the garden of Ehabbara, which
thou lovest.
39. *me-ir-tu⁴⁴ ub-la lib-ba-ša šu-a-ra.⁴⁵*
The maiden whose heart bore lamentation.
40. *ka-ia-nam-ma ki-i sak-ta-ku-ma.*
How can I always keep silent!
41. *a ši-ḥ-ku ma-an mārē (TUR. TUR).*
O, I long for the couch of the sons.⁴⁶
42. *bar-ma-a-tu⁴⁷ ēnā¹-ia im-da-la-a ši-it-ta.*
My eye-lids are full of sleep.
- 43, 44. *ra-am-ka lu-u a¹ba²KA⁴⁸ ši-ḥa-tu-ka lu-u ḥurāṣu.*
Thy (*masc.*) love is indeed a jewel; thy longing is in-
deed gold.
45. *ra-a-mi ni-i-ru muš-na-me-ru šīli.*
My love is a light, illuminating the shadows.
46. *mu-u-ša aḥ-su-us-ka-ma.*
By night I thought of thee (*masc.*).⁴⁹
47. *ip-šu pi-i-ka.⁵⁰*
The utterance of thy (*masc.*) mouth.

⁴² I. e. during the time that Tammuz is in the netherworld. This song was evidently a Larsa recension of the liturgy; cf. also line 38 below, where Ehabbara, the temple of Shamash in Larsa, is mentioned.

⁴³ I. e. the goddess Ishtar.

⁴⁴ I. e. Ishtar; cf. Obv. II, 22, where she is so called.

⁴⁵ This word appears again only in *Creation Epic*, I, 24; cf., however, *Šu'aru*, one of the names of the netherworld, the abode of Tammuz.

⁴⁶ A euphemistic name for the male votaries of the fertility cult; cf. Cant. 2:2:

Like the apple-tree among the trees of the forest, so is my Dod among the sons.
In his shadow I love to dwell, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

⁴⁷ So called because the lids darken (*barāmu*) the eyes. So far as I know, the word appears only here in this form but is identical with *barāmu*. Ebeling, Barton and Langdon all failed to perceive its meaning.

⁴⁸ On this stone, as yet unidentified, see Streck, *ZA*, XVIII, 180 f.

⁴⁹ Cf. Cant. 8:1. Also Rev., III, 19: *ši-it-tu at-la-ki ma-a-ra lu-ti-ir*, "O sleep, come, that I may embrace the son!"

⁵⁰ This line is identical with the beginning of line 5 above and would make it appear that the same song is cataloged twice but in different groups.

48. *iš-tu ṣa-al-la-ku i-na su-un ma-a-ri.*
After I lay in the bosom of the son.
49. *ri-bi-ka⁵¹ ṣa ab^{an}ukni ṣadi.*
Thy (*masc.*) passion is of the lapis-lazuli of the mountain.
50. *ḥa-di-iš ak-ša ḥar-ru.*
Joyfully hasten, O king.
51. *mi-ig-ru ḥa-am-ru.⁵²*
Welcome is the lover.
52. *i-na la-li-ki ḥu-un-bi.*
In thy (*fem.*) abundance flourish!
53. *u-ka-a-al ra-am-[ka(?)].*
I possess thy (*masc.*) love.
54. *i-na ṣa-a-ar*
In the breath of
55. *ti*

(Rest of column broken.)

Even a casual perusal of the lines of the hymns listed above must convince the most skeptical of two things: (1) that these hymns were taken from the liturgy of the Tammuz-Ishtar cult, and (2) that the similarity between them and the songs in the book of Canticles is so close that both must belong together. The structure of the songs is the same (two lovers representing god and goddess wooing each other and alternating in the praise of each other's charms); the general theme is the same (love); many of the phrases are quite identical; the figures are introduced in similar fashion; the lines breathe the same delight in love; and the intent of all is manifestly to bring about the awakening of life in nature. Both are liturgies of the fertility cult. The only difference is that one group has come from Babylonia and the other from Palestine, where numerous influences tended to obscure and efface its original character.

⁵¹ For the meaning see Langdon, *ad. loc.*

⁵² One of the many names applied to Tammuz, "the lover of Ishtar," *ḥamer Ishtar*; see, e. g., Zimmern, *Der babyl. Gott Tammuz*, p. 7; Langdon, *Tammuz and Ishtar*, p. 28, note 2. Rather curiously Ebeling, Barton and Langdon all failed to identify this word.