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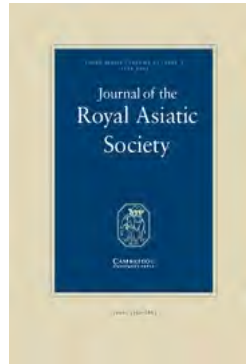
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THE DEITY OF THE CRESCENT VENUS IN ANCIENT WESTERN ASIA

By JOSEPH OFFORD

A CUNEIFORM tablet in the British Museum referring to the celebrated deity of the Babylonians, Merodach (who is identified with the planet Jupiter), states that he possessed four attendant dogs, and gives their names. It is possible that these represent the four largest of the planet's moons, because instances have been known of these having been discerned with the naked eye.

If some of the early inhabitants of Mesopotamia could detect the satellites of Jupiter, it may be considered as certain that the crescent phases of Venus were also familiar to them.¹ The proof from cuneiform literature that they were so is decisive; for instance, Herr Ernst Weidner, reviewing Dr. Carl Bezold's *Astronomie Himmelschau und Astrallehre bei den Babyloniern*, quotes an omen text of Assurbanipal's era as follows:—

“If on the right horn of Venus a star is visible you will have good crops in the land.

When upon the right horn of Venus a star is not visible the land will bear many misfortunes.”²

Another tablet reads: “If Ishtar takes away upon her right horn a star, and if Ishtar is large but the star small, the King of Elam will be strong and mighty.”

For the Babylonians to derive omens connected with the planet's horns makes it certain that they were familiar with its crescent phases. This leads up to some

¹ Dr. Heinrich Gretschel, *Lexikon der Astronomie*, says the crescent form of the illuminated part shows up beautifully at the time of greatest brilliance, and in the clear atmosphere of Persia and Peru it is said to be seen with the naked eye.

² *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 1912, columns 318, 319: “Enuma Ishtar ina Ārni imitti sa Kakkabu la innamir nuhsu mati (ibashshi).”

important explanations of ancient Semitic mythology and astronomy.

Assyrian and Babylonian texts frequently tell us that Ishtar, or Venus, was daughter of Sin, the Moon-god. The probable reason for this paternity is now apparent; it was because her father, like herself, appeared in crescent form, and so both were horned divinities.¹

The ancient Arabians, or Mineans, appear to have connected Venus more closely with the Moon, by making it a male deity; but they called Venus Athtar (Ishtar), apparently to secure the favours of both sexual versions of the deity, as worshipped by them, and also their Semitic kinsmen in Assyria, by giving the star deity the sex of one form and the feminine name of the other.

Though the male Venus, with his feminine name of Athtar, was the form under which the southern Arabs worshipped the planet, their brothers in the north, especially in the case of their later descendants the Safaites, adored the star as Allat, a female deity. That this was their name for Venus, Herodotus explains when he says (i, 131) that the Arabs venerated Aphrodite-Ourania under the name of Alitta; and again (iii, 8) he says her name was Alilat. Some scholars, such as Wellhausen, have confused Allat-Venus with the Arab female solar goddess, because the Arabs sometimes, when speaking of the sun as a supreme deity, called her al-Ilahat, "the goddess." Herodotus does not refer to al-Ilahat, but to Alilat, later shortened to Allat. The Sabeans, cognisant of Venus = Athtar, being a male deity among their kinsmen, sometimes united the two titles of the planet, and speak of Allat-Athtar, **אלת עֵתָר**. Allat is mentioned in Palmyrene inscriptions, but almost always called Athene. Thus Zenobia's son Wahballat ("gift of Allat") is called

¹ See S. Langdon, "The Lament of the Daughter of Sin": *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, xxii, 203. The light of both is reflected, and this may have been detected.

Athenodoros. A relief from Emesa, now at Brussels, shows Athene as Allat. Her robe, nimbus, and sceptre connect her with Astarte and Atargatis, and so we find Allat, as *paredra* of Melek-bel, sometimes called Astarte and sometimes Atargatis, the last probably derived from Athtar'ate, עתתר עת.

It is to the duplication of Venus as morning and evening star that much confusion as to the real name of the goddess is due. She was, in fact, reasonably entitled to two names, hence may be correctly called Aphrodite-Astarte and Atargatis, from Ishtar-'Athtar and Até.¹ The southern Arabs had the same duplication of their male morning and evening stars, in the names Azizu and Arsu of very early texts, later Aziza and Monimus. The Classics knew Aziza was the morning star because a text in *Corpus Ins. Lat.*, iii, i, p. 173, reads "Deo Azizo bono puero conservatori", i.e. Phosphorus.

M. René Dussaud has pointed out that Aziz, or Azizu, is an epithet for a deity who was עתתר שרקך, "Athtar Orientalis"; so עתתר = الشرق is the rising sun, "Oriens," and עתתר שרקך was morning star. Julian at Edessa worshipped Azizo and Monimus. A text from Palmyra calls Arsu and Azizu the "benign gods" (see name Aziza in Ezra x, 27, and Arza² in 1 Kings xvi, 9, and the name Azizus of an Arab chief who fought for Philippos in his revolt against Antiochus). The North Arabian Allat, as morning and evening stars, had by Mahomet's time

¹ A Greek inscription from Delos, published by M. Clermont Ganneau, *C. R. Académie des Inscriptions*, 1909, 308, shows that the author, who lauds his deities because of an escape from pirates, identifies the Syrian Astarte with Aphrodite-Ourania—

Δί᾽ Οὐρίῳ καὶ Ἀστάρτῃ Παλαιστίνῃ Ἀφροδίτῃ Οὐρανίᾳ, θεοὶ ἐπηκόοι.

"To Zeus Ourios, to Astarte Palestina, to Aphrodite Urania, divinities attentive."

The dedicator was an Ascalonite from the Palestine coast, and Astarte=Aphrodite-Ourania was goddess of that town. See also A. Boissier, "Hathor et Ninharsag"; in *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, xi, columns 234-6, 551.

² See Arsamus, one of the seventy translators according to Aristeas.

become the two Uzza, distinguished sometimes by the Arabs as Ruda or Raada, and Manat. Ruda, the Safaite Redu, was identical with Arsu.¹

The Akkadian Babylonians seem themselves to have been uncertain as to the sex of Ishtar (Venus), for a text when speaking of her under the name of Dilbat or Delephat, states that the planet was female at sunset and male at sunrise, and so androgynous.² The same text tells us that at sunrise the star was Ishtar of Akkad, whilst at sunset she was Ishtar of Erech.

As to the hermaphrodite sexuality of Ishtar, we have the Moabite Stone speaking of Ishtar-Kemosh, thus uniting the sexes.³ It is curious, too, that a Phœnician inscription of Tyre unites the horned Baal and Astarte into a kind of hermaphrodite, binary deity, for the text reads "Baalition, son of Abdhor, priest of Melek-Astarte".⁴

Melek-Astarte may, however, be parallel with the

¹ See H. Derenbourg, *Le Culte de la Déesse al-Ouzza en Arabie au IV Siècle de notre ère.*

² See *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, iii, 53, 30-1 :

"Kakkabu sinnišat Dilbat ina ereb šamši i[zzaz]."

"Kakkabu zikarat Dilbat ina šit šamši izzaz."

The statement Jastrow points out is that the *star* is male and female. The scribe uses the form *zikarat*, "she is male," not *zikaru*, "is male." (Cf. Sayce in the *Trans. Soc. Bibl. Arch.*, iii, pp. 106-7, 1872.)

³ The "Tanit pene Baal" of Phœnicia is perhaps connected with the same concept, so the Chinese call the evening Venus, Tai-po; it was male and husband of Nu Chien, the morning star.

⁴ See *Comptes Rendus, Académie des Inscriptions*, 1902, 468. It is interesting that Virgil, *Æneid*, ii, 632, uses the masculine for Venus, "Ducente Deo." Servius, commenting on this, says some say the goddess was double-sexed, quoting Calvus, who wrote at the commencement of our era, saying "pollentemque deum Venerum". Morris Jastrow, *Revue Archéologique*, xvii, 283, adds a comment of Macrobius on Virgil. "Of Venus there is a bearded statue at Cyprus, whose body and garb are those of a woman with sceptre and male character (*natura*), and they believe that she is both masculine and feminine." Aristophanes calls her Aphroditos. The Phœnician duplexity of the Astarte goddess had been introduced to the knowledge of the ancients by way of Cyprus. Catullus calls the Cyprian Venus of Amathus "Duplex Amathusia". His meaning is clearly set forth by Paon in his work on Amathus, i.e. that she was depicted as male: *εἰς ἄνδρα τὴν θεὸν ἐσχηματῶσθαι ἐν κύπρῳ λέγει.* Jastrow, *ibid.*, with some of whose conclusions I do not agree.

priestess of Carthage, whose inscription was given in 1907 by Clermont Ganneau. The text calls her "Rab Cohanim" for Mater Sacrorum. Putting a priestess in the masculine is like the Egyptians, who had priestly colleges with female heads or directors; and Queen Hatasu in her coronation texts takes male titles, as king, and is shown on the relief pictures beside them with a beard.

Venus was the stellar symbol of the great Babylonian, Phœnician, and Syrian goddess Ishtar-Ashtoreth-Astarte, and their intimate connexion is confirmed by Dr. Th. G. Pinches finding Ishtar written Ashtara in cuneiform inscriptions of 2000 B.C. Further, that Ashtoreth-Astarte was nothing else than the Aramean, Phœnician, and Syrian form of the name Ishtar, is further proved by the discovery of an inscription at Memphis to the Syrian Astarte, wherein the goddess' name is written Ashtare. This text doubtless belonged to the Memphis temple of Astarte mentioned by Herodotus, and referred to in an Egyptian inscription in Lepsius' *Denkmäler*, i, 16.

One of the commonest attributes of Ashtoreth-Astarte was a horned head-dress, and indeed she was named, as we find in the Old Testament and in Phœnician and Carthaginian inscriptions, Ashteroth Karnaim, "the double-horned." The site called Ashteroth Karnaim of Genesis xiv, 5 was probably a double-peaked mountain with a temple in the hollow between the horns, like the Baal Karnaim temple near Carthage discovered by M. Toutain. Also the "Karnaim of Atargatis" of 2 Maccabees xii, 26 was a Karnaim, Ἀσταρτεῖον, or Ἀρτεμίσιον, in some similar geographical position in Palestine.

Because of the horned attributes of Ashtoreth-Astarte, and led astray by the misstatements of classic authors, such as Lucian and Herodian, many writers have called her a lunar deity; but this is an error, for she was certainly considered by the Greeks as identical with

Venus. At the shrine of Afça she was worshipped as a star. The Assyrian Ishtar was undoubtedly not a lunar goddess, but the morning star, for the name given her of Dilbat,¹ the "Announcer", clearly points to the morning star.

Another proof of Ishtar being the Chaldean Venus is in the account of the "Attack of the seven evil spirits upon the Moon", wherein when the moon was temporarily worsted, that is to say eclipsed, Ishtar set up a glittering throne beside Anu, the sky-god, because the moon's light having vanished Venus no longer had a stellar rival in brilliancy.

Moreover, Ishtar, as attendant upon the Sun-god, went to Hades to seek her lord as Tammuz, being the nearest solar planet. Dr. Pinches, in the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* for 1909, p. 23, proves this from the cuneiform texts giving titles of Ishtar some of these, especially Simua from Simu, which is rendered in Dr. Reissner's *Sumerisch-Babylonische Hymnen* by *qarnū*, "horned," and other names such as Timua, meaning probably "ribbed", or "curved".² Also Submua, "bowed," or "bent", i.e. the form assumed by a bow drawn for discharge. Yet that she was a horned deity is certain, because Père Scheil has published a Babylonian cylinder depicting her as a cow.

This fact of the cow-goddess is closely connected with the two-horned altars, or shrines, found by Mr. Evans in Crete, which he calls "horns of consecration"; and with the form of the votive offerings at Astarte-temples on Phœnician sites, such as the Balearic Islands, which have images in the form of cow heads with long horns. So the Greeks, when making Astarte a wanderer, represent her as Europa riding upon a bull. The latter animal

¹ Dr. C. J. Ball says Tai-po, the evening Venus of China, is identical with Dilbat.

² See the word *karni* for "horn" at p. 197, n. 2, of this article.

is undoubtedly the same creature as that which, in the Babylonian legend, Anu, the most common putative father of Ishtar, created and gave to her in the Gilgamesh story.

Finally, the Moon-god Sin was masculine; whilst the connexion between the cults of Ishtar–Astarte–Aphrodite, as a voluptuous female deity, is well known. It is probable that the divergent concepts associated with Astarte–Aphrodite of gentleness, or femininity and heat, are connected with Venus as a morning star; goddess of dew, of moisture and fertility, and of the augmenting warmth of the sun's rays; she, as his attendant star, appearing when the rays of the setting sun have shot their last shafts of heat.

The cumulative evidence that the goddess was Venus the star, yet a crescent-symboled deity, and not the moon, is decisive. Her crescent symbol, therefore, can only be accounted for as having arisen from the crescent form of the planet having been observed, and so properly associated with the deity. So much, indeed, did the crescent symbol coincide with that of the lunar deities, that when the real origin of the connexion was forgotten it caused the confusion as to the true astronomical attribution of Astarte–Ishtar,¹ that has been alluded to in two of the late classic writers who have called her a lunar goddess.

In the clear air of Mesopotamia doubtless it was possible to detect the phases of Venus; and so Ishtar–Venus, the later Ashtoreth–Karnaim, is, like so many other primitive concepts, a reasonable expression of astronomical symbolism, the horned emblem upon the figure of the deity indicating the star associated with her name.

¹ For identity of Aphrodite–Astarte, and so of Ishtar, see Philo of Byblos; *τὴν Ἀστάρτην Φοίνικες τὴν Ἀφροδίτην εἶναι λέγουσι*. An inscription found at Tyre in 1911 confirms both this identity and the stellar connexion of Astarte, for it gives the title to the *paredra* of Heracles, of Astronoe, the Phœnician goddess whose name appears in Damascius (*Vita Isid.*, *ap. Photius, Bibliotheca*, 242, ed. Bekker). The inscription is *Θεῶν Ἡρακλέους καὶ Ἀστρονόης*.