



The Worship of the Moon

Because of its size and also because of the events which accompanied the first appearance of the Moon, many ancient peoples regarded the Moon as the chief of the two luminaries. “The sun was of smaller importance than the moon in the eyes of the Babylonian astrologers.” ⁽¹⁾

The Assyrians and the Chaldeans referred to the time of the Moon-god as the oldest period in the memory of the people: before other planetary gods came to dominate the world ages, the Moon was the supreme deity. Such references are found in the inscriptions of Sargon II (ca. -720)⁽²⁾ and Nabonidus (ca. -550).⁽³⁾ The Babylonian Sin—the Moon—was a very ancient deity: Mount Sinai owes its name to Sin.

The Moon, appearing as a body larger than the Sun, was endowed by the imagination of the peoples with a masculine role, while the Sun was assigned a feminine role. Many languages reserved a masculine name for the Moon.⁽⁴⁾ It was probably when the Moon was removed to a greater distance from the earth and became smaller to observers on the earth, that another name, usually feminine, came to designate the Moon in most languages.⁽⁵⁾

References

1. C. Bezold in Boll, *Stern Glaube und Sterndeutung*, p. 4. [In Babylonian cosmology the Moon-god Sin (Nanna) was considered to be the father of the Sun-god Shamash (Utu) and was commonly addressed as “father Sin” (S. Langdon, *Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms* [1909], p. 193. F. Cumont noted the prominence of Sin in the earliest historical period in Babylonia and found it “remarkable that at first the primacy was assigned to the Moon.” (*Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, p. 124; cf. Lewy, “The Late Assyro-Babylonian Cult of the Moon”). According to the Dabistan (ch. 29), a Persian work of early Islamic times, the Ka’abah of Mecca was originally dedicated to the worship of the Moon. On Moon worship among the ancient Arabs, cf. also Tuch, “Sinaitische Inschriften,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Morgenlaendisches Gesellschaft* III (1849), p. 202, and Osiander, “Vorislamische Religion der Araber,” *ibid.*, VII (1853), p. 483. Cf. I. Goldziger, *Mythology among the Hebrews and its Historical Development* (1877), p. 72ff. The Greeks regarded the Moon as of greater importance than the Sun: “The sun’s subordination to the moon . . . is a remarkable feature of early Greek myth. Helios was not even an Olympian, but a mere Titan’s [Hyperion’s] son.” (R. Graves, *The Greek Myths* [London, 1955] vol. I, sec. 42.1). Christoval de Molina (*An Account of the Fables and Rites of the Yncas*, transl. by C. R. Markham [London, 1873], p. 56) described sacrifices to the Moon by the natives of Peru in the sixteenth century. Also the Indians of Vancouver Island assigned greater importance to the Moon than to the Sun (E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* [New York, 1929], p. 299), as did several tribes in Brazil (*ibid.*, loc. cit.).
2. See Sargon II’s “Display Inscription,” lines 110 and 146: “since the distant days of the age of Nannaru.” Cf. H. Winckler, *Himmels und Weltenbild der Babylonier* (Leipzig, 1901), p. 31: “Die aeltere Zeit bezeichnet Sargon II als die Zeit der Nannar—eine

Erscheinungsform des Mondgottes." [A cuneiform text describes the first appearance of the Moon: "When the gods . . . fixed the crescent of the moon, to cause the new moon to shine forth, to create the month. . . . The new moon, which was created in heaven with majesty, in the midst of heaven arose." R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (New York, 1912), p. 46.].

3. D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria* (1926-27), II. 870; cf. J. Lewy, "The Late Assyro-Babylonian Cult of the Moon and its Culmination in the Time of Nabonidus," *Hebrew Union College Annual* (19xx), pp. 443, 461ff., 486.
4. *Yoreach* in Hebrew, *Sin* in Assyrian, *der Mond* in German, *Mesiatz* in Russian, and so on.
5. *Levana* in Hebrew, *Luna* in Latin and several of the Romance languages, as well as Russian, and so on. [Macrobius (*Saturnalia* VIII. 3) quotes Philochorus as having said that "men offer sacrifices to the moon dressed as women and women dressed as men, because the moon is thought to be both male and female." (Transl. by P. Davies)].

