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NIMROD BEFORE AND AFTER THE BIBLE

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The biblical information concerning the figure of Nimrod is scarce. Post-biblical tradition has added supplementary details that cannot be found in the biblical text, however much they may be presented as results of exegesis of this text. This article first examines the biblical data about Nimrod and sees whether he can be identified with an extra-biblical, a pre-biblical, prototype. Second, it investigates the ways in which the few biblical data have given rise to post-biblical haggadic developments. K. van der Toorn has written the first part of this essay, P. W. van der Horst the second.

NIMROD BEFORE THE BIBLE

The principal passage in which Nimrod is mentioned places him against a Mesopotamian background. Thus we read, in Gen 10:8–12:

> And Cush begat Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a hero. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord." The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Akkad, all of them[1] in the land of Shinar. From that land he went forth to Assyria, and built Nineveh, that is the vast city [Rehoboth-Ir], Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah, which is the great city.

The historical backdrop of the figure of Nimrod is furnished by an enumeration of cities either dominated or built by him. Most of the toponyms offer no problem to the interpreter: Babel (Akkadian: Bābilu), Erech

[1]Read *wĕkullānâ* instead of *wĕkalneh*, according to the emendation proposed by William F. Albright, "The End of 'Calneh in Shinar'," *JNES* 3 (1944) 254–55.

(Akkadian: Uruk), and Akkad all lie in southern Iraq, the heartland of the ancient Mesopotamian civilization. These three cities, each with historical roots well into the third millennium BCE, were part of what was known in cuneiform texts as "the Land of Sumer and Akkad." The biblical text informs the reader that the three cities, "all of them" according to an emendation of the Hebrew text supported by an ancient Samaritan interpretation,[2] were to be found in the "Land of Shinar." Other biblical texts make it clear that *Šinʿār* is a designation of Babylonia, that is, southern Mesopotamia.[3]

Some extra-biblical equivalents of *Šinʿār* are Egyptian *Sngr*[4] and the name *Šanḫar* or *Šanḫara* used in Hittite documents,[5] in a letter from the king of Alashiya (Cyprus) to the Pharaoh of Egypt,[6] and in the Hurrian letter from Tushratta.[7] Earlier doubts about equating *Šanḫar(a)* with Babylonia[8] have lost their force; scholars now see that the name refers to a kingdom on a par with Hittite Anatolia, Egypt, Hanigalbat, and Assyria.[9] The origin of the name remains a moot point. Earlier Assyriologists believed it to be a western variant of *Šumer*, the name given to southern Mesopotamia by its

[2]See J. A. Thompson, "Samaritan Evidence for 'All of them in the Land of Shinar' (Gen 10:10)," *JBL* 90 (1971) 99–102.

[3]In Gen 11:2 "the land of Shinar" is connected with Babylon. Genesis 14 mentions Amraphel king of Shinar alongside other unknown rulers from territories such as Ellasar, Elam, and Goiim. 1QapGen 21.23 reads *bbl* instead of *šnʿr*, indicating that Shinar had come to be a synonym of Babylonia, the common designation for southern Mesopotamia in the second and first millennia BCE. Josh 7:21 mentions a "mantle from Shinar" found by Achan among the spoils of Canaanite Ai. The passage gives no clue about the localization of Shinar. Isa 11:11, on the other hand, mentions Shinar in a list of territories inhabited by exiled Jews. Shinar is named between Elam and Hamath, and distinguished from Assyria, which brings us once more to the Babylonian homeland. In the younger texts of Zech 5:11 and Dan 1:2, Shinar has clearly become a designation for the Babylonian territory. This is confirmed by the LXX version of Zech 5:11, where *ʾereṣ Šinʿār* has been translated *en gē Babylōnos*.

[4]See R. Giveon, "Toponymes Ouest-Asiatiques à Soleb," *VT* 14 (1964) 245; Wolfgang Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (2d rev. ed.; Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1971) 278.

[5]See Giuseppe F. del Monte and Johann Tischler, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der hethitischen Texte* (Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes 6; Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1978) 344.

[6]J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln* (Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915) no. 35:49.

[7]Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, no. 24 iv 95.

[8]For a survey of opinions by O. Weber, see *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, 2. 1080–83; see also Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Tell El-Amarna Tablets* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1939) 1. 1998–99, commentary on line 49.

[9]See nn. 5–7 and Hans G. Güterbock in E. Laroche, "Documents hiéroglyphiques hittites provenant du palais d'Ugarit," *Ugaritica* 3 (1956) 103 n. 3.

third-millennium inhabitants.[10] This equation is beset with philological difficulties, however.[11]

According to the advocates of the "*Šinᶜār=Šumer*" hypothesis, the name *Šumer* itself is a dialectal form of ki-en-gi(-r),[12] the current designation of southern Mesopotamia in Sumerian texts. Assuming that ki-en-gi(-r) is to be interpreted as /Kengir/, one could argue that the Sumerian phoneme /ng/ became a /m/ in the Akkadian variant of the name, /nḫ/ in the Hittite and el-Amarna designations, and /nᶜ/ in the Hebrew name *Šinᶜār*. Georges Dossin called attention to an analogous distribution of phonemes in connection with the name of Canaan. Many scholars think that the region referred to in Hebrew as *knᶜn* occurs in texts from Mari, Byblos, Tyrus, Assyria, Anatolia, and Babylonia under the name *Kinaḫ(ḫ)u*.[13] On the basis of a list of toponyms, Dossin believes that the Sumerian designation for Canaan was Ki-en-gi-en, i.e., /Kengen/.[14] While this seems to be evidence to support the change of /ng/ into /nᶜ/, the development from /k/ to /š/ (/Kengir/ >/Šumer/) remains unexplained. Anton Deimel offered parallels such as French *Château* <Latin *castellum*, which although interesting cannot be matched by similar Sumerian vocabulary examples.[15] Biblical scholars could argue, however, that the change of /k/ into /š/ occurred as early as the third millennium BCE, in the adaptation of the Sumerian name into its dialectical variant, and is therefore a problem for Sumerologists to solve and of no relevance to the question of whether Shinar derives from Shumer.

[10]See, e.g., Anton Deimel, "ŠUMER = *Šinᶜar*," *Bib* 2 (1921) 71–74; A. Deimel, "Nimrod (Gen 10:8–12)," *Or* 26 (1927) 76–80.

[11]For a recent discussion of the various problems involved, see R. Zadok, "The Origin of the Name Shinar," *ZA* 74 (1984) 240–44.

[12]See, e.g., Deimel, "ŠUMER," 72.

[13]See Manfred Weippert, "Kanaan," in D. O. Edward, ed., *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (7 vols.; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1932–1989) 5. 352. The earliest mention of "Canaanites" (immediately preceded by the *ḫabbātum*, "robber") occurs in a letter from Mari (A 3552), published by Georges Dossin, "Une mention de Canaanéens dans une lettre de Mari," *Syria* 50 (1973) 277–82; cf. Jean-Marie Durand, "Villes fantômes de Syrie et autres lieux," *MARI: Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires* 5 (1987) 219–20. It is doubtful whether *kinaḫḫu* or *kinaḫnu* is to be distinguished from *qinaḫḫu*, analysed by Benno Landsberger as consisting of the noun *qina*, "purple" (cf. Syr. *qenaᶜ*), followed by the grammatical element *-ḫḫ-* [Landsberger, "Über Farben im Sumerisch-Akkadischen," *JCS* 21 (1967) 166–67]. Apparently, purple was traditionally associated with Canaan; it is unclear whether the region took its name from the produce or vice versa.

[14]See Georges Dossin, "Kengen, Pays de Canaan," *RSO* 32 (1957) 35–39; reprinted in *Recueil Georges Dossin: Mélanges d'Assyriologie (1934–1959)* (Akkadica Suppl. 1; Leuven: Peeters, 1983) 85–89.

[15]See Deimel, "ŠUMER," 74.

Nearly all the above arguments are open to criticism. It is not certain at all that ki-en-gi(-r) is to be understood as /Kengir/. The name appears to be constructed on the model of ki- lagaša(-k i). Consequently, the philological connection between *Šumerum* and ki-en-gi(-r) is far from clear. Perhaps *Šumerum* is an autonomous Akkadian designation for southern Babylonia.[16] The parallel with the term Canaan, adduced by Dossin, also does not hold, since the alleged reference to Canaan in the Sumerian list of toponyms is based on a misinterpretation of the evidence. The country of ki-en-gi(-en) is mentioned in the Nippur forerunner to the lexical series ḪAR-ra=*ḫubullu*. Comparison with ḪAR-ra=*ḫubullu* XXI section 9:27' shows that it refers to Sumer.[17]

In the light of these observations, it is uncertain whether *Šinʿār* derives from *Šumer*. In spite of the linguistic difficulties, however, the two must in some way be connected. In all likelihood the name is of a pre-Sumerian origin, which adds to the complexity of the problem. Ran Zadok's proposed solution, namely, that the Hebrew designation and its various equivalents go back to the name of one of the Kassite tribes, the Šamḫarites,[18] is not very attractive either. It is hardly conceivable that so minor a tribe would lend its name to an entire region. Furthermore, the objection that in view of Egyptian *Sngr* the /ʿ/ of Hebrew *Šinʿār* reflects /ġ/, which leads one to posit **Šanġar* as the forerunner of *Šinʿār*, is not a final blow to the hypothetical derivation of *Šinʿār* from the antecedent of *Šumer*.[19] For the time being, the problem must remain unresolved. Whatever be the linguistic antecedents of Shinar, however, there can be no doubt that in Gen 10:10 the term refers to southern Mesopotamia.

Although the toponyms of Gen 10:10 pose no major problem of identification, some of the geographical designations of Gen 10:11–12 are still somewhat of a *crux interpretum*. From southern Mesopotamia (Babylonia) the scene of interest shifts to the north, to the Assyrian homeland. Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik) and Calah (Assyrian: Kalḫu, modern Nimrud) are well-known cities that flourished under the neo-Assyrian empire. Rehoboth-Ir and Resen, however, have not yet been convincingly identified with any neo-Assyrian cities in the cuneiform records. Since Nineveh and Kalḫu did

[16]Claus Wilcke, "Zum Königtum in der Ur-III Zeit," in P. Garelli, ed., *Le Palais et la Royauté: XIXe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1974) 229–30 [Reference courtesy K. R. Veenhof, Leiden].

[17]Erica Reiner, *The Series ḪAR-ra* = ḫubullu *Tablets XX–XXIV* (Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 11; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1974) 105:314 and 18:27'.

[18]This is the solution of Zadok, "The Origin of the Name Shinar."

[19]*Pace* Zadok, "Origin of the Name Shinar," 241.

not become cities of international repute until the time of the neo-Assyrian rulers, one would expect Rehoboth-Ir and Resen to refer to other great neo-Assyrian centers, such as Dur-Sharrukin (modern Chorsabad). The Hebrew names in the Masoretic text, however, cannot be harmonized with the expected Assyrian toponyms.

Reluctant to pronounce a verdict of *non liquet*, both Assyriologists and Biblicists have endeavored to solve the riddle of Rehoboth-Ir and Resen. Dossin tried to show that they were cryptonyms for the city of Assur.[20] The evidence he adduces, however, is insufficient; his suggestion has won no adherents. E. Lipiński proposes to understand Rehoboth-Ir literally as "city squares." He connects the expression with the subsequent mention of Nineveh and translates: "he built Nineveh with city squares."[21] Grammatically this solution is unattractive, but the idea that Rehoboth-Ir is not the name of an unknown city but qualifies Nineveh, mentioned just before, should be seriously considered. In 1983, Jack M. Sasson, following this track, argued that *rḥbt ʿyr* means "the broadest city." It would have been inserted by the author to stress the magnitude of Nineveh, just as *hāʿîr haggĕdōlâ* in vs 12 underscores the greatness of Calah.[22] Assuming that *ʿîr* is a collective singular, one should perhaps vocalize *rḥbt ʿyr* as *raḥăbat ʿîr*, which would lead one to translate "the broadest of cities," that is, "a most vast city." Isa 29:19 and Isa 35:9 could be adduced as analogous constructions.[23] When we translate the phrase as "and he built Nineveh, which is a most vast city," we have a statement that agrees with the traditional image of Nineveh in the Bible (cf. Jonah 3:3; 4:11).

If we accept the latter solution for the otherwise inexplicable Rehoboth-Ir, we are still left with the problematic toponym Resen. It would not do to say that the term means "bridle" and is a symbolic name. Nor is the identification with the village Resh-eni, mentioned by Sennacherib in connection with his work to supply Nineveh with water,[24] very plausible. The

[20]Georges Dossin, "Le site de Rehobot-ʿIr et de Resen," *Muséon* 47 (1934) 107–21. The article has been re-issued in idem, *Recueil Georges Dossin*, 70–84.

[21]E. Lipiński, "Nimrod et Assur," *RB* 73 (1966) 84–85. The interpretation of *rĕhōbôt-ʿîr* as "city squares" goes back, in fact, to E. Dhorme's translation in the *Bible de la Pléiade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956).

[22]Jack M. Sasson, "Rehōvōt ʿîr," *RB* 90 (1983) 94–96.

[23]See GKB § 132c 2; P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (Rome: Institut biblique pontifical, 1923) § 141d. The expression *ʿz mlk* in Ps 99:4 might be another instance of this construction, if it is indeed to be translated as "the mightiest king."

[24]Henry C. Rawlinson and George Smith, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia* (4 vols.; London: Bowler, 1870) 3. no. 14:9. For a transcription and translation of the pertinent text, see Daniel D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Oriental Institute Publications 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924) 79:9.

location of the latter village would fit with the rest of the text, but the village in question can hardly have been known outside Assyria. Instead of Resen the LXX reads *Dasen*. This can be explained by assuming a scribal error due to the similarity between *daleth* and *resh* in the Hebrew script. Should Resen be a corruption of Desen, however, one might envisage the possibility that the name refers to Dur-Sharrukin, the administrative city founded by Sargon II, halfway between Nineveh and Kalḫu to the north. Yet this is hardly more than a strained guess. For the time being, it seems wisest to confess our ignorance as to the identification of Resen.

Despite the toponymical difficulties adumbrated above, there can be no doubt that Gen 10:8–12 situates Nimrod in Mesopotamia, with his sphere of influence based in the south (Babylonia) and later extending to the north (Assyria). If Nimrod belongs to the Mesopotamian world, as it is generally admitted, why did the author of Gen 10:8–12 link him up with Cush as his ancestor? In the Bible, Cush is currently used as the eponym of an African people living in southern Egypt. There have been attempts to circumvent the difficulty by assuming that Cush refers here to a different region. Around 1500 BCE, Babylonia yielded to the rule of the Kassites, a non-Semitic people whose origins are obscure. Various scholars have ventured the suggestion that Cush in Gen 10:8 refers to this people.[25] P. T. English proposes to identify Cush with Kash(ta), a region in Asia Minor northeast of the Hittite kingdom.[26]

A differentiation between the Cush mentioned in Gen 10:6–7 and Cush, ancestor of Nimrod, referred to in Gen 10:8, is hardly convincing, however. Despite occasional attempts to identify Nimrod with an Egyptian king[27] or a Libyan hero,[28] the Mesopotamian character of Nimrod is beyond dispute. Unless one decides that here "Cush" is due to a scribal error,[29] one must look for a common denominator for Cush and Babylonia that is neither ethnic nor geographical. Recently, B. Oded made the suggestion that "only by socio-economic and socio-cultural criteria could a scribe combine in one setting the kingdom of Babylonia and the great

[25]E. Speiser, "In Search of Nimrod," *Eretz-Israel* 5 (FS. B. Mazar; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and the Hebrew University, 1958) 32*; Lipiński, "Nimrod et Assur," 80–81.

[26]P. T. English, "Cushites, Colchians and Khazars," *JNES* 18 (1959) 50.

[27]Kurt Sethe, "Heroes and Hero-Gods (Egyptian)," *ERE* 6 (1913) 650a.

[28]E. Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstamme* (Halle an der Saale, 1906; reprint Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967) 448.

[29]Thus., e.g., M. Naor, "'And Cush Begot Nimrod' (Gen 10:8)," *Beth Mikra* 100 (1948) 41–47 [Hebrew]. Naor proposes to read "Put" instead of "Cush" (pp. 46–47).

cities of Mesopotamia in the north with Egypt and Cush in the south." For the Israelites, Oded argues, Egypt and Mesopotamia represented "the settled and organized branch of civilization, in contrast to the nomads and their tribal confederations."[30] This solution preserves the integrity of the biblical passage and seems preferable to the tentative identifications of Cush with a region other than that of southern Egypt or Ethiopia.

Since Nimrod is a Mesopotamian figure whose fame exceeded the bounds of his homeland, one expects to find him mentioned in the cuneiform records. Ever since the archaeological discoveries of the last century and the decipherment of the cuneiform script, scholars have attempted to spot the Mesopotamian prototype of the biblical Nimrod. The identifications they advance depend in part on their appreciation of the biblical data. Does Gen 10:8–12 describe Nimrod as a god, a demigod, or as a sundry mortal?

Those who hold that the prototype of Nimrod must be sought among the historical heroes of Mesopotamia stress that Nimrod's activities, according to the account of Gen 10:8–12, were strictly mundane. His achievements might have been extraordinary; they were not of themselves supernatural. Starting from the assumption that Nimrod was a mortal, scholars have suggested a variety of prototypes, the most appealing of which is the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207).[31] Apart from the minor difficulty that the first part of his name would obviously have been dropped, the historical range of the dominion ascribed to Nimrod does not fit this ruler. Though his political influence embraced Babylonia, it cannot be maintained that Babylon, Uruk, and Akkad were "the beginning of his kingdom." Also, the cities mentioned in Gen 10:9–12 are given in a more or less chronological sequence. The list reads as a condensed résumé of Mesopotamian history. Akkad, though still in use as a cult-center in the first millennium,[32] had its *floruit* under the Sargonic dynasty. Kalḫu had its heyday in the first half of the first millennium BCE, some fifteen hundred years later. If Nimrod is not a god, he must at least have enjoyed a divine longevity, his reign embracing both cities.

Aware of the problems created by the identification of Nimrod with a particular human individual, yet convinced that Nimrod could not have been a god, Sh. Abramski has suggested that Nimrod personifies the his-

[30]B. Oded, "The Table of Nations (Genesis 10)—A Socio-Cultural Approach," *ZAW* 98 (1986) 14–31, esp. 28.

[31]Speiser, "In Search of Nimrod," 32*–36*.

[32]See G. J. P. McEwan, "Agade after the Gutian Destruction: the Afterlife of a Mesopotamian City," in H. Hirsch, ed., *Vortrage gehalten auf der 28. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Wien. 6–10. Juli 1981* (*AfO* Beiheft 19; Horn: F. Berger, 1982) 8–15.

tory of the Mesopotamian monarchy. The stress on his building activities in Assyria can be explained in the light of the Assyrian hegemony at the time of the redaction of Genesis 10.[33] Judging by the context of Gen 10:8–12, the interpretation of Nimrod as a symbol of Mesopotamian political leadership may well correspond to the intention of the redactor.[34] Yet this leaves the question as to the Mesopotamian namesake of Nimrod unanswered. Even if the name *Nimrod*, meaning "we shall revolt," is an intentional distortion, it must be connected in some way with a specific figure from Mesopotamia's cultural heritage. Also, the details of Nimrod's hunting career would seem to be too specific to be taken as a characteristic of Mesopotamian rulers in general. The Israelite author may have adapted his material to serve his particular purpose. Yet, what is the tradition that is incorporated here and critically reflected upon?

Although it must be granted that the biblical author avoids any implications of Nimrod's divinity, his portrayal of the Mesopotamian hero suggests that the latter was more than a mere human (because of the time-span of his career), yet with a well-circumscribed individuality (a mighty hunter, ruler, and builder of cities). This hardly allows any other conclusion than that the prototype of Nimrod must have been a god. The emphatic precision that Nimrod was a mighty hunter "before the Lord" (Gen 10:9) could be due to the author's censorship of the Mesopotamian material he worked with. What we have in Gen 10:8–12 are the vestiges of Mesopotamian mythological motifs purposefully reworked to make them acceptable for an Israelite believer. The fact that, in our eyes, hunting and building are purely human exploits does not invalidate the hypothesis that Nimrod is modeled after a Mesopotamian deity. On the contrary, some Mesopotamian gods were credited with capturing and killing mythical animals and founding local centers of civilization.

The opinion that Nimrod goes back to a Mesopotamian deity is not new. As early as 1871, J. Grivel suggested that Nimrod is to be identified with Marduk (biblical Merodach or Bel).[35] Unwittingly, he thus revived an ancient haggadic speculation in which Nimrod is identified with Belus.[36]

[33]Sh. Abramski, "Nimrod and the Land Nimrod," *Beth Mikra* 82 (1980) 237–55; 83 (1980) 321–40 [Hebrew].

[34]Such is also the opinion of Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (BKAT 1/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1974) 687.

[35]J. Grivel, "Nemrod et les écritures cunéiformes," *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 3 (1874) 136–44. On p. 136 Grivel refers to the appendix of an article entitled "Le plus ancien Dictionnaire" that he wrote for the *Revue de la Suisse catholique* (August 1871) in which he first made his suggestion.

[36]See the second part of this paper and n. 70.

This identification, though rejected by many, was given a new lease on life in 1966 by E. Lipiński.[37] One of the principal arguments in its favor is the role of Marduk in the Babylonian myth of creation *Enūma eliš*, "when on high."[38] In this composition Marduk figures as the champion of the gods. He is the "valiant hero" (IV 70,126) who, with his bow and arrow, his club and his net (IV 35–41), has captured and killed the monsters of Tiamat's army. In return for his heroic exploits he is proclaimed leader of the gods, king of the universe (IV 14; V 88ff.). One of the first acts Marduk performs after his triumph is the construction of Babylon (V 129ff.; VI 37ff.). In Babylonian iconography, Marduk is frequently depicted as a warrior standing on a *mušḫuššu*, a monster with the body of a lion, the neck and head of a snake, and the hind legs of an eagle.[39]

Although Marduk fits the description of Nimrod as a mighty hunter, a ruler, and a builder of cities, the proposed identification meets two obstacles. From a philological point of view, one is unable to see how the name Marduk could become Nimrod in the Hebrew Bible. This difficulty is all the more pressing since Marduk does occur in the Hebrew scriptures as Merodach or Bel. Lipiński tries to refute this objection by assuming that Nimrod is a *tiqqûn sōpĕrîm*: confronted with the name Marduk, the Hebrew scribes would have deleted the final *kaph*, while they prefixed a *nun*, so as to obtain Nimrod, "we shall revolt."[40] Though one may admire the ingenuity of this solution, it does not carry conviction. An attendant problem is the synonymous parallelism between "the land of Assyria" and "the land of Nimrod" in Mic 5:5[6]. It is true that Sennacherib introduced the cult of Marduk in Assyria, but he did not succeed in turning the god into an Assyrian deity. Marduk never became an emblem of Assyria's political power, as was the case with the god Ashur and, to a lesser extent, the god Ninurta.

Although the identification of Marduk as the prototype of Nimrod must be abandoned, it does contain a parcel of truth and points the way to a

[37]Lipiński, "Nimrod et Assur," 77–93.

[38]The provisional cuneiform edition of this text has been published by W. G. Lambert and Simon B. Parker, *Enūma eliš. The Babylonian Epic of Creation: The Cuneiform Text* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966). The widely used translation by Alexander Heidel (*The Babylonian Genesis* [Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1942; reprinted Phoenix Edition, 1963]) has to be corrected and supplemented by the aforementioned cuneiform edition.

[39]See W. G. Lambert, "The History of the m u š-ḫ u š in Ancient Mesopotamia," Ph. Borgeaud, Y. Christe, and I. Urio, eds., *L'animal, l'homme et le dieu dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (Leuven: Peeters, 1984) 87–94.

[40]Lipiński, "Nimrod et Assur," 78.

more satisfying solution to the problem. We have seen that Marduk could be adduced as the model for Nimrod on account of his role in *Enūma eliš*. Yet the motif of a mythological battle between a heroic god and an army of monsters was not invented by the author of the Babylonian creation myth. On the contrary, in the literary history of Mesopotamia the topos of the divine combat occurs as early as the third millennium BCE. In a number of these compositions it is the god Ninurta who is the monster-slayer. When this role is conferred upon Marduk in *Enūma eliš*, the mythological feats traditionally ascribed to Ninurta become accomplishments of the city god of Babylon. This reinterpretation of an ancient theme is a piece of religio-political propaganda. By turning Marduk into a Ninurta redivivus, the Babylonian theologians underscored the preeminence of their god, whose triumph had to match the leading position of their city.[41]

The oldest myth known to us in which Ninurta acts as a divine warrior is a Sumerian composition customarily referred to as *LUGAL-E*, according to the first word of its opening line, "The king (a storm whose radiance is princely)."[42] In the introductory paean, Ninurta is said to be a "hero striding fiercely into battle" (line 4). The battle is with Azag (called Asakku in Akkadian), an enemy born of the union between heaven and earth (lines 26–27). Apart from Azag, the myth lists other adversaries whom Ninurta has "killed in the mountain" (lines 129–34). The Akkadian *Myth of Anzû* describes Ninurta's triumph over Anzû, a giant bird that may have had the appearance of a bat or an eagle.[43] Other texts enumerate still other monsters defeated by Ninurta.[44] Among the slain enemies of Ninurta, the largest group consists of mythical animals, such as the lion, the seven-headed serpent, the six-headed boar, the bison, the seven-headed hound, and the buffalo. In his edition of *LUGAL-E*, J. van Dijk has pointed out the strik-

[41]See W. G. Lambert, "Ninurta Mythology in the Babylonian Epic of Creation," in K. Hecker and W. Sommerfeld, eds., *Keilschriftliche Literaturen. Ausgewahlte Vortrage der 32. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1986) 55–61.

[42]The text has been edited by J. van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL Le récit épique et didactique des Travaux de Ninurta, du Déluge et de la Nouvelle Création* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1983). See also the translation by Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once . Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1987) 233–72.

[43]For the *Myth of Anzû* see M. E. Vogelzang, *Bin šar dadmē. Edition and Analysis of the Akkadian Anzu Poem* (Groningen: Styx, 1988) and H. W. F. Saggs, "Additions to Anzu," *AfO* 33 (1986 [1988]) 1–29. For a discussion of the appearance of Anzû see William W. Hallo and W. L. Moran, "The First Tablet of the SB Recension of the Anzu-Myth," *JCS* 31 (1979) 70.

[44]For a survey, see Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur* (AnOr 52; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1978) 141–54.

ing analogy between these feats of Ninurta and the works of Hercules.[45] Considering the parallels, it is likely that the Mesopotamian and the Greek mythographers drew their material from the same (prehistoric) source.

Judging by the mythological exploits of Ninurta, then, there is every reason to call him a "mighty hunter." By virtue of his mythological career, Ninurta became the patron of hunters. The neo-Assyrian kings, who liked to boast of their hunting prowess, refer to him as their source of inspiration. Thus Tiglath-Pileser I writes that he went hunting for bulls, elephants, lions, and birds "at the command of Ninurta who loves me."[46] The god's role as a hunter has been corroborated by his association with the star called "arrow" (Sumerian KAK.SI.SÁ, Akkadian *šukūdu*), i.e., Sirius.[47] The identification of Ninurta with Sirius, the principal star of *Canis maior* (referred to as "Bow" by the Mesopotamians), may have facilitated the identification of Nimrod with Orion in late antiquity.[48] In Greek mythology, Sirius is known as the dog of Orion, a legendary giant and hunter. Though in Mesopotamian astrology Orion (called Sipazianna, "faithful-shepherd-of-heaven") is taken as the celestial image of Dumuzi (Tammuz),[49] a conflation of traditions could have resulted in the idea that Orion instead of Sirius was the heavenly counterpart of Ninurta/Nimrod. In this connection it is interesting to note that in Syriac Orion is named *gabbār*, "hero."

It would be mistaken, however, to limit the exploits of Ninurta to the realm of hunting. Just as Marduk's defeat of Tiamat in *Enūma eliš* paves the way for his acts of creation, so Ninurta's killing of Azag in *LUGAL-E* is followed by his organization of Sumer's water-economy. After his slaying of Azag, Ninurta reportedly constructed dikes around the cities and conducted the waters into the bedding of the Tigris. "He made the fields bear mottled barley, made the orchard irrigation beds bear fruit at harvest,

[45]Van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL*, 17–18.

[46]Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge and Leonard W. King, *Annals of the Kings of Assyria* (London: Luzac, 1902) 84:vi 61–87:vi 84.

[47]See Leonard W. King, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery* (London: Luzac, 1896) no. 50:29 ["you are Sirius, (that is) Ninurta, the first among the great gods"]; E. Burrows, "Hymn to Ninurta as Sirius (K128)," *Centenary Supplement to the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London, 1924) Pl. II, vss 8 and 12 ["(Ninurta) indefatigable arrow that [slays?] all the enemies... whose name in heaven is Arrow"]; Erich Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiosen Inhalts*, vol. 1 (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 28; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1919) no 76:14 [// O. R. Gurney, *The Sultantepe Tablets* II (London: The British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1964) nos. 214–17 i 65], no. 83 i 4.

[48]See B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora· Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934) 283. See also n. 96.

[49]Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) 154.

heaped up grain piles; high over the (surrounding) country the lord (Ninurta) piled them up (on) the harbor quays."[50] Ninurta's acts of heroism are a prelude to his role as the founder of Mesopotamian civilization. To the Sumerians, agriculture was the basis of all human civilization. As the one who created the conditions for farming and who taught the appropriate techniques, Ninurta goes by the traditional epithet of "the good farmer." The *Sumerian Georgica*, a collection of instructions for farmers, is placed under his authority.[51] On boundary stones, the plough is used as his symbol.[52]

According to the theology of Nippur, Ninurta not only stands at the beginning of agriculture, he detains all the *ME*s, the powers of civilized life. At the dawn of Sumerian society, our sources tell us, Ninurta made a journey to Eridu, the city of the god Enki. There the gods conferred upon him the supreme authority. He was entrusted with the leadership of the gods, that all the universe might be under his command.[53] The composition *Angim dimma* relates his triumphant return from Eridu to Nippur, once the gods had proclaimed him king. There he is received in his temple Eshumesha, from where he is to exercise kingship unto the ends of the universe.[54] Dominion over the established order is also the reward of Ninurta for his slaying of Anzû, according to a recently discovered text belonging to the *Myth of Anzû*.[55] An Assyrian commentary from the first millennium BCE describes how the god, after his triumph over the giant bird, was invested with the paraphernalia of kingship by his fathers.[56]

In several respects, then, Ninurta fits the description of Nimrod given in Gen 10:8–12. The literary tradition of Mesopotamia makes Ninurta indeed "the first on earth to be a hero." His heroism manifested itself mainly in

[50]*LUGAL-E*, 11. 353–65. For the last lines I have followed the translation of Jacobsen (*The Harps That Once. . .*, 253).

[51]See Claus Wilcke, "Philologische Bemerkungen zum *Rat des Šuruppag* und Versuch einer neuen Übersetzung," *ZA* 68 (1978) 231–32. For Ninurta as a god of agriculture, see also Adam Falkenstein, *Sumerische Gotterlieder* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1959) 1. 83:iii 22.

[52]U. Seidl, "Die babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 4 (1968) 125–28.

[53]D. Reisman, "Ninurta's Journey to Eridu," *JCS* 24 (1973) 3–10. See also Falkenstein, *Sumerische Gotterlieder*, 84; Åke W. Sjöberg et al., *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (Texts from Cuneiform Sources 3; Locust Valley: Augustin, 1969) 136:463; Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta*, 58:9–14.

[54]The text has been edited by Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta*.

[55]H. W. F. Saggs, "Additions to Anzu," *AfO* 33 (1986 [1988]) 25:120–24.

[56]Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works* 124: VAT 8917; cf. Livingstone's commentary on p. 146.

his exploits as a formidable hunter (a *gibbôr ṣayid*) of mythical animals. Also the dominion (*mamlākâ*) ascribed to Nimrod has its equivalent in the career of Ninurta. The only thing to distinguish Nimrod from Ninurta is the former's reputation as a builder of (Assyrian) cities. The importance of this discrepancy, however, should not be overestimated. In cuneiform literature, Ninurta is celebrated as the founder of the Mesopotamian civilization. Though the texts at our disposal do not say that he built cities, they imply that he laid the foundations of all civilized life and thus created the conditions under which human settlements could prosper. In *LUGAL-E*, it is stated explicitly that Ninurta took measures to protect all the cities from future inundation (lines 349–55). Thus, while strictly speaking Ninurta was not a builder of cities, his beneficial activities embraced the urban civilization as well.

The identification of Nimrod with Ninurta can be corroborated by an analysis of the toponyms mentioned in Gen 10:8–12. The sequence of city names roughly reflects the political history of Mesopotamia. Before the second half of the second millennium BCE, political and cultural hegemony was concentrated in southern Mesopotamia. By Middle-Assyrian times, Assyria had gained military and political ascendancy; this situation presumably still obtained when Gen 10:8–12 was written. The historical shift of the political center from the south to the north corresponds with the gradual propagation of the cult of Ninurta. Under the first dynasty of Akkad (ca. 2330–2150), Ninurta developed from a local deity of minor importance into a warrior god equal in rank with An, Enlil, and Enki. The fusion of Ninurta and Ningirsu, the warlike god of Lagash, favored the introduction of his cult in the cities of southern Mesopotamia other than Nippur, his traditional home.[57] One of the cities to have dedicated a temple to Ninurta at the beginning of the second millennium BCE was Babylon.[58] Around 1200 BCE, however, the focus of the cult of Ninurta was moving to Assyria. From Babylonia, the god "went forth to Assyria" (Gen 10:11). This move is reflected by Tukulti-Ninurta I, the first Assyrian king to invoke the deity in his throne-name.

In this connection it can hardly be fortuitous that the biblical author chose to mention Kalḫu. This city was the principal center of the Assyrian cult of Ninurta.[59] If Resen (LXX: *Dasen*) should turn out to refer to Dur-

[57]See William W. Hallo, "Review of 'The Return of Ninurta to Nippur' by Jerrold S. Cooper," *JAOS* 101 (1981) 253–55.

[58]See E. Unger, "Babylon," in Erich Ebeling and B. Meissner, eds., *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (7 vols. to date.; Berlin/Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1932–) 1. 361–62: § 120.

[59] See Brigitte Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* (2 vols.; Studia Pohl Series Maior 10/1; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1981) 1. 94.

Sharrukin, the choice of the name may have been determined by a similar motive, since the latter city also possessed a temple of Ninurta.[60] In what first seems to be a rather arbitrary list of Mesopotamian toponyms, then, one discovers an attempt to trace the historical development of the cult of Ninurta. Originating from the south, the god came to be a typical Assyrian deity, which is why Mic 5:5[6] could use "the land of Nimrod" as a synonym for "the land of Assyria."

In view of the above evidence, it is not surprising that many scholars have identified Nimrod with Ninurta.[61] It should not be ignored, however, that the philological relationship between the two names is still unclear. In Emesal, a dialectal variant of Sumerian, Ninurta is called Umununurta.[62] In Aramaic texts from the first millennium BCE, his name appears as *ʾnrt* or *ʾnwšt*.[63] Some Late-Babylonian anthroponyms refer to the deity as *nurti*, *urti*, or *urtu*.[64] None of these forms can be considered the immediate precursor of the Hebrew form *nmrd*. Assuming that *nimrōd* is not a deliberate distortion of the Mesopotamian name, one would have to posit a form **nwrt* as its substratum. It should be remembered that the cuneiform sign read as *urta* also has the value of *uraš*, which points to an underlying form **uraṯ*. One could conceive of the development **nwrt* >**nmrt* >*nmrd*. In the present state of our knowledge, such reconstructions are of necessity speculative.

An attendant complication of the problem is the name *Nisrōk* in 2 Kgs 19:37 // Isa 37:38 (LXX: *Neserach*, variants *Esdrach*, *Esthrach*, *Asrach*), which can hardly refer to any other than the god Ninurta. These philological difficulties, still insolvable, cannot be used as a decisive argument against the identification of Nimrod with Ninurta. A systematic study of biblical names of Mesopotamian origin constantly encounters these types of problems. Though we have no philological evidence for the development of Ninurta into Nimrod, we have the cold consolation that all the other alleged Mesopotamian prototypes of Nimrod are as problematic, if not far unlikelier, from a philological point of view.

Despite these difficulties, the evaluation of the available evidence strongly suggests that the biblical Nimrod was modeled after the Mesopotamian god

[60]Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, 1. 83.

[61]See, e.g., W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *JTS* 16 (1965) 298–99 n. 2.

[62]See Åke W. Sjöberg, "Miscellaneous Sumerian Texts. III," *JCS* 34 (1982) 62–80, esp. 71 ad i.18.

[63]Jonas C. Greenfield, "Three Notes on the Sefire Inscription," *JSS* 11 (1966) 100–103; R. Zadok, "Babylonian Notes," *BO* 38 (1981) 548.

[64]Zadok, "Babylonian Notes," 548.

Ninurta. Within the context of Genesis 10, the use of Mesopotamian material by the biblical author does not come as a surprise. It has long been known that many elements in the first eleven chapters of Genesis have a Babylonian background. The creation as a series of separations, the fashioning of humankind, the divine repose, the assumption of Enoch, the antediluvian heroes, the deluge, the Babel of tongues—they are all motives the Israelites could have borrowed from the Babylonians.[65] Nimrod, too, is of Mesopotamian origin. Apparently, the biblical author was familiar with the "biography" of Ninurta: transformed into a human being, he was given a place in the account of Israel's prehistory as the first "mighty hunter before the Lord."

Since Abram, too, is said to have come from southern Mesopotamia, the legendary tale of his confrontation with Nimrod has a specific *raison d'être.* Nimrod (Ninurta) is the archetype of the Babylonian deity, a symbol of Mesopotamian civilization. Prior to his covenant with the God of Israel, Abram had to triumph over the religious powers of his native soil. Also, the position of the legend, just after Gen 11:28, is significant. It marks the transition from the primeval history in Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, to the wanderings of the patriarch deep down into the Promised Land.

A last observation concerning the Mesopotamian prototype of Nimrod: Abram was not the first to defeat him. Although the cuneiform tradition usually pictures Ninurta in a heroic role, there is one Sumerian composition in which the god is worsted.[66] The myth, dubbed *Ninurta's Pride and Punishment* by Samuel N. Kramer, relates how Ninurta made hostile plans against Enki. When Enki realized that Ninurta meant to do him serious injury, he fashioned the turtle out of clay. The turtle attacked Ninurta but was unable to chase him away. Enki then had the turtle dig a pit into which he threw Ninurta alongside the turtle. Thus Ninurta was turned into an object of derision: the monster-slayer was confined to a pit out of which neither he nor the turtle could escape. Since only a fragment of the myth has been preserved, one may surmise that Ninurta was eventually rescued from his embarrassing position. Yet the tenor of the text is clearly

[65]See Lambert, "New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," 285–300; Samuel N. Kramer, "The 'Babel of Tongues': A Sumerian Version," *JAOS* 88 (1968) 108–11; Rykle Borger, "Die Beschwörungsserie *Bīt Mēseri* und der Himmelfahrt Henochs," *JNES* 33 (1974) 183–96; R. A. Oden, Jr., "Divine Aspirations in Atrahasis and in Genesis 1–11," *ZAW* 93 (1981) 197–216. These studies are but a small sample of the available literature.

[66]B. Alster, "'Ninurta and the Turtle,' UET 6/1 2," *JCS* 24 (1972) 120–25; Samuel N. Kramer, "Ninurta's Pride and Punishment," *Aula Orientalis* 2 (1984) 231–37.

ironic: in the eyes of the author Ninurta has limited powers. There are circumstances in which he is as helpless as a turtle.[67] This exposure of Ninurta as a braggart differs completely from the account of Abram's conflict with Nimrod. Still, both tales have a similar purpose: they convey the message that Nimrod/Ninurta is not the superior deity he pretended to be.

NIMROD AFTER THE BIBLE

We do not know exactly when post-biblical speculation about the enigmatic hunter began to develop. Unfortunately, the first piece of haggadic evidence to be discussed is rather uncertain since Nimrod's name is not mentioned in it, and whether or not he is implied there is very controversial. In one of the fragments of Pseudo-Eupolemus, in fact, an *adespoton*,[68] we read the following: "Abraham traced his family to the giants. While these giants were living in Babylonia, they were destroyed by the gods because of their wickedness. One of them, Belus, escaped death and came to dwell in Babylon. There he built a tower and lived in it. It was named Belus, after Belus who built it" (quoted from Alexander Polyhistor by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.18.2).[69] Here is a medley of allusions to Genesis 6 (both the motif of the giants and that of the flood) and Genesis 11 (the building of the tower of Babel).

As we shall see in other instances of linking Genesis 6 to Genesis 11, the intermediate link is Nimrod from Genesis 10. The problem in this case, however, is that if Belus, one of the giants who built the tower, is identical with Nimrod, he also is said to have escaped the flood, which would imply an identification of Noah and Nimrod! And indeed, Martin Hengel speaks of "this identification of Noah and Nimrod=Bel-Kronos, which necessarily follows from the text."[70] Odd as this identification may seem at first sight,

[67]The Greek story of Orion's defeat by a scorpion could perhaps be adduced as a distant parallel of the Sumerian composition. Orion, though not a god, is a giant and a hunter. In response to his threat that he would exterminate all the living animals on earth, Gaia sent the scorpion to kill the arrogant hero. See P. Wehrli, "Orion," *PW. Neue Bearbeitung* 18/1 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1939) 1073–74.

[68]See on this matter Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors I: Historians* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983) 158–59.

[69]Translation by Holladay, *Fragments*, 177.

[70]*Judaism and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 2. 60 n. 244. There Hengel polemicizes with Ben Zion Wacholder, "Pseudo-Eupolemos' Two Greek Fragments on the Life of Abraham," *HUCA* 34 (1963) 94. J. Freudenthal, *Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste judaischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke* (*Hellenistische Studien*, I+II; Breslau: Skutsch,

Hengel points out that other peculiar identifications can be found elsewhere in early Jewish literature—of Shem and Melchizedek, and of Phinehas and Elijah, for example. There are clear traces of a positive image of Nimrod in other passages still to be discussed. Moreover, there existed speculations in early Jewish haggadic circles about whether or not Noah descended from the giants of Genesis 6.[71] So an identification of Noah and Nimrod should be regarded as a distinct haggadic possibility. Nevertheless, the connection is problematic. First, Eusebius quotes Alexander Polyhistor as saying that he found these data "in some anonymous writings," which may imply that he drew here upon several authors; second, the plural "gods" may imply that one of these authors was not a Jew at all; third, these observations suggest that what we have in this fragment is "a potpourri of traditions, most probably thrown together by Alexander Polyhistor out of disparate elements."[72] Hence one should be careful in drawing too firm conclusions from this passage.

The earliest Jewish writer mentioning Nimrod explicitly is Philo of Alexandria. In his writings is a clear creation of a negative image of the hunter. Of course, in a typically Philonic way, Nimrod is allegorized. In his *Quaestiones in Genesin* 2.81–82 Philo first remarks that Ham, Nimrod's grandfather, stands for evil and that Ham's son Cush stands for "the sparse nature of earth" and is a symbol of unfruitfulness and barrenness. Nimrod is Cush's son because spiritual unproductiveness can only produce giants, i.e., people who honor earthly things more than heavenly things. "For in truth he who is zealous for earthly and corruptible things always fights against and makes war on heavenly things and praiseworthy and wonderful natures, and builds walls and towers on earth against heaven. But those things which are [down] here are against those things which are [up] there. For this reason it is not ineptly said, 'a giant before (*enantion*) God,' which

1875) 94, quotes a remark from the "History of Armenia" by the early medieval Armenian Christian scholar Moses of Chorene to the effect that Belus and Nimrod are to be identified. Hengel is followed by Holladay, *Fragments*, 187 n. 46, and by P. W. van der Horst, "The Interpretation of the Bible by the Minor Hellenistic Jewish Authors," in Martin Jan Mulder, ed., *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 541.

[71]See *1QapGen* 2. 16 and *1 Enoch* 106. 8 and cf. Jack Pearl Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 14; see also the pertinent remarks in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (rev. ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Goodman; Edinburgh: Clark, 1986) 3.1. 332–33.

[72]Thus R. Doran in *OTP* 2.878.

is clearly in opposition to the Deity. For the impious man is none other than the enemy and foe who stands against[73] God." Philo then adds that Nimrod should be translated as "Ethiopian," i.e., the black one, because he has no participation in light. In *De gigantibus* 65–66, Philo remarks on Gen 6:4 that the sons of the earth surrender to the nature of the flesh instead of to reason. "It was Nimrod who began this desertion [. . .], his name means 'desertion' (*automolēsis*)."

In these two very brief passages from the first half of the first century CE we have in a nutshell a number of haggadic elements that return time and again in later haggadic developments.[74] First we note the connection of Nimrod with the story of the giants in Genesis 6 on the one hand and with the story of the tower of Babel on the other. There are several reasons for this connection. The offspring of the sons of God are called *gibborim* (LXX: *gigantes*) in Gen 6:4, and Nimrod is called a *gibbor* (LXX: *gigas*) in Gen 10:8–9. This suggested to the early haggadists that Nimrod may have been one of the giants of Genesis 6. In Gen 10:10 the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom is said to have been Babel in the land of Shinar, and in Gen 11:1–10, the people who settled in the land of Shinar are said to have built a city there that was called Babel (11:9). If that city was the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom, he cannot but have been one of its builders. So Nimrod who was one of the giants of Genesis 6 was also the one who had built Babel. All this is implied in these two short passages of Philo. Second, Philo etymologizes Nimrod's name: his name means "desertion." This element too recurs in other writings where the name Nimrod is repeatedly explained from the Hebrew word *marad*, "to rebel" (against God, that is), which comes very close to Philo's notion of desertion from God, if it is not identical to it.[75] Third, because Nimrod is a son of Cush, Philo calls him an Ethiopian, a black man. This characterization helped to blacken Nimrod in the development of the tradition, whereas the biblical text itself does not do anything of the sort.[76] Finally, Philo exploits the fact that the LXX version of Gen 10:9 calls him a mighty hunter *enantion* the Lord. This

[73]The Greek text probably also had *enantion*, but the Armenian version, which is our only textual witness here, has a different word than the one used in the phrase "a giant before God."

[74]See also the useful comments in David Winston and John Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria: A Commentary on De gigantibus and Quod deus sit immutabilis* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983) 69–71, 272.

[75]See Lester L. Grabbe, *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation. The Hebrew Names in Philo* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 191.

[76]On the evaluation of blacks in antiquity, see Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity. Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap, 1970).

word, used by the LXX translators as equivalent of *lipne*, could also have the meaning of "against"; so Nimrod's activities must have been directed against the Lord.

This element will recur in the targumim and elsewhere, but most explicitly in St. Augustine, when he says about the phrase that Nimrod was a great hunter before the Lord:

> Some interpreters have misunderstood this phrase, being deceived by an ambiguity in the Greek and consequently translating it as "before the Lord" instead of "against the Lord." It is true that the Greek *enantion* means "before" as well as "against". . . It is in the latter sense that we must take it in the description of Nimrod; that giant was "a hunter against the Lord." For the word "hunter" can only suggest a deceiver, oppressor and destroyer of earth-born creatures. Thus he, with his subject peoples, began to erect a tower against the Lord, which symbolizes his impious pride (*Civ. D.* 16.4).

The *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* by Pseudo-Philo, an author about whom we know nothing except that he probably lived in the second half of the first century CE, contains a full-blown Nimrod haggada.[77] In *LAB* 4:7, Gen 10:9 is quoted as "he began to be arrogant (*superbus*) before the Lord." The sons of Ham make Nimrod their leader (5.1) and Nimrod has all the sons of Ham pass in review (5.5). Finally in chapter 6 we find for the first time the story that will have such a rich future, namely, the direct confrontation of Nimrod with Abraham: the leaders of the three tribes of Shem, Ham, and Japheth planned to build the great tower in Babel, but twelve men, including Abraham, refuse to join the project because they were worshippers of the Lord. Joktan, the chief of the leaders, puts these men in jail, though he does so reluctantly, being himself a secret worshipper of the Lord. When he offers them the chance to escape, only Abraham declines the offer. Nimrod, however, wants the men to be punished severely. He finds out that only Abraham is left in jail, and demands that he be thrown alive into a fiery furnace. The sentence is executed, but God sees to it that Abraham does not suffer the least injury in the flames. Whereas 83,500 others are burnt by the fire that leaps forth out of the furnace, Abraham escapes unscathed.

What is the background of the development of such a motif that is so evidently modeled upon the story of the three young men in the fiery

[77] I used the edition by Daniel J. Harrington et al., *Pseudo-Philon. Les antiquités bibliques* (2 vols; Paris: Cerf, 1976) and Harrington's translation in *OTP* vol. 2.

furnace in Daniel 3?[78] We know from later sources (e.g., *Genesis Rabbah*, see below) that the words *Ur Kasdim* in Gen 15:7 ("I am the Lord who brought you out of *Ur Kasdim*") were taken to mean "the fire of the Chaldeans" since Ur was read as *'or*, "flame, fire."[79] If God himself said that he had rescued Abraham from the fire of the Chaldeans, if Babel was the center of the Chaldeans, if Nimrod was the king of Babel, and if Nimrod was the archrebel against God, then inevitably there must have been a confrontation between these two men, the more so since a conflict over idolatry was suggested by the fact that Josh 24:2 states: "Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods." A conflict between Abraham and Terah over the idols in the city of Nimrod is one of the stock elements in most of the haggada on these persons. Nevertheless, it is clear that the motive for confrontation between Nimrod and Abraham is here still in its infancy. They are not the only characters on stage and the plot is relatively simple. We cannot be sure whether Pseudo-Philo is the originator of the motif. The connection of Ur of the Chaldeans with the motif of fire appears two centuries earlier, in *Jubilees* 12, but Nimrod does not figure there.[80] Neither is there a confrontation between Abraham and Nimrod in Pseudo-Philo's contemporary, Josephus, as we shall presently see. This suggests that the motif may not yet have been widespread in this early period.

Josephus relates in his *Antiquitates* 1.113–14 that the people in the plain of Shinar suspected that God was plotting against them in urging them to emigrate, in order that, being divided, they might be more open to attack:

> They were incited to this insolent contempt of God by Nimrod [lit. Nebrodes], grandson of Ham the son of Noah, an audacious man of doughty vigour. He persuaded them to attribute their prosperity not to God but to their own valour, and little by little transformed the state of affairs into a tyranny, holding that the only way to detach men

[78]On the role of Daniel 3 in this story, see also Geza Vermes, "The Life of Abraham," in his *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 88, and B. Beer, "Zur jüdischen Sagengeschichte," *MGWJ* 4 (1855) 59–65.

[79]See e.g. Hermann L. Strack and Paul N. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1928) 4. 1. 454 n. 4, and John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 187–88.

[80]Also in the second century BCE we find Philo Epicus stating that Abraham "left the splendid enclosure of the giants" (frg. 1, 4–5). This seems to imply that Babel was built by the giants, but the poet does not name Nimrod as one of them. Nevertheless it was clear that the haggadic process was fully on its way already in the middle of the second century BCE, which can also be seen in Jdt 5:5–8.

> from the fear of God was by making them continuously dependent upon his own power. He threatened to have his revenge on God if he wished to inundate the earth again, for he would build a tower higher than the water could reach and avenge the destruction of their forefathers.

As we already remarked, there is no conflict with Abraham here. But there are some other new elements. Besides the familiar components of Nimrod's building the tower and his rebellious attitude toward God, we find here Nimrod as the instigator of suspicion that God was plotting against them by urging a migration that would divide the people of Shinar and so expose them to attack, and of their consequent refusal to colonize. Building the tower now is intended to counteract God's command to migrate and colonize, as well as to prove that God would not be able to bring a new flood over the earth. We can observe here how the various ingredients from Genesis 6, 10, and 11 get more interwoven.[81]

Turning to the rabbinic evidence, the targumim yield some interesting insights. Let us look at some of their renderings of Genesis 10 and begin with an exceptional piece of evidence: *Tg. Pseudo-Jonathan*'s rendition of Gen 10:11. Whereas in 10:9 the translator had said that Nimrod was "a mighty rebel before the Lord, wherefore it is said that from the day on which the world was created there has not been any like Nimrod a mighty hunter and a rebel (*mrwdh*) before the Lord," in 10:11 Nimrod is unexpectedly "immortalized as the outstandingly righteous individual of his generation"[82] by the following words: "Out of that land [sc. Shinar] Nimrod went forth and ruled in Asshur because he had not wished to associate with the project of the generation of the divisions [cf. Gen 10:25]. And he left those four cities, and the Lord settled him elsewhere instead, and he built other towns, Nineveh, etc." Several comments are in order here. First, the fact that Nimrod is here said to have left Babel is a consequence of the fact that in the Hebrew text the words *min haʾareṣ hahiʾ yaṣa ʾashur* were taken to mean "he left that country for Asshur" instead of "Asshur left that

[81]On Nimrod's role in Josephus' rendering of Genesis, see the extensive and excellent discussion by Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979) 93–121, esp. 96–98.

[82]Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of the Bible* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988) 35. Levine cites this instance as one of the many cases where in the very same targum one finds midrashic elements that are mutually contradictory. "This reflects the eclectic use of sources, the variant purposes to which midrash was put, and the latitudinarian approach to targum itself" (ibid.).

country." Once Nimrod was made the grammatical subject of *yaṣa'*, a reason had to be found for his leaving the country of Babel. Apparently, because he left before chapter 11, he must have been opposed to the building of the tower.

There are other traces of such traditions. To be sure, they are found in Christian writings, but there is little doubt that their authors drew upon Jewish sources, as was so often the case with Syrian writers such as Ephraem and Ishodad.[83] In his commentary on Gen 10:9, Ephraem Syrus remarked: "Nimrod was a strong giant before the Lord because in accordance with God's will he waged war upon the peoples in order to spread them out to the areas that God had allotted them. Therefore, if someone wants to bless a leader or king, he says: 'May you become like Nimrod, a strong giant before the Lord, triumphant in the wars of the Lord.'"[84] And Ishodad of Merv commented on the same verse that the wish "may you become like Nimrod, a brave hunter before the Lord," was in earlier times a common way of greeting a leader, and that Nimrod became so famous by God's will because he had combatted the builders of the tower of Babel and driven them away from the city; only Peleg remained, who still spoke Hebrew, the primeval language, which was thus preserved under Nimrod's rule.[85] These passages make it somewhat certain that there must have been a somewhat extensive positive Nimrod haggada, which has all but disappeared from early Jewish literature, even though the Bible itself nowhere specifically states that Nimrod had an evil character. Pseudo-Eupolemus and Pseudo-Jonathan have preserved some traces of this positive approach.[86]

Tg. Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 11:28 again presents a new motif:

[83]A. Levene, *The Early Syrian Fathers on Genesis* (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1951) esp. 123ff.

[84]See the translation in R.-M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesin et in Exodum commentarii* (CSCO 153; Louvain: Durbecq, 1955) 52–53.

[85]See the translation in C. van den Eynde, *Commentaire d'Išodad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 1 *Genèse* (CSCO 156; Louvain: Durbecq, 1955) 143–46. On the matter of Hebrew in the Nimrod haggada, see also Louis Ginzberg, "Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern und in der apokryphischen Literatur," *MGWJ* 43 (1899) 468–70, 485. The following two works do not yield anything for our subject: Robert Devreesse, *Les anciens commentateurs grecs de l'Octateuque et des Rois* (Vatican City: Bibliotheca Apostolica, 1959), and Françoise Petit, *Catenae graecae in Genesin et Exodum*, vol. I (CChr Series Graeca 2.15; Turnhout: Brepols, 1977).

[86]Levene (*Early Syrian Fathers*, 85) quotes from a Syriac MS on the Pentateuch in the Mingana collection the following section: "Of Nimrod, Scripture says, 'He was a mighty hunter before the Lord.' It was according to the will of God that he should be renowned; and he made war on those who built the tower and he first captured Babylon. Therefore it is said, 'Be like unto Nimrod' as when one blesses his neighbour with any kind of blessing." Levene also makes the interesting observation that Ibn Ezra in his commentary discards the unfavor-

> And it came to pass, when Nimrod cast Abram into the fiery furnace because he would not worship his idol and there was no power for the fire to burn him. that Haran's [Abraham's brother] heart became doubtful, and he said: "If Nimrod prevails, I will be on his side, but if Abram prevails, I will be on his side." And when all the people who were there saw that the fire had no power over Abram, they said in their hearts: "Is not Haran, the brother of Abram, full of divining and charms, and has he not uttered a spell over the fire to stop it burning his brother?" At once fire fell from the heavens and consumed him [Haran], *and Haran died in the presence of his father* [Gen 11:28], even as he was burnt in the land of his birth in the fiery furnace which the Kasdai had made for Abram his brother.[87]

The biblical text of Gen 11:28 reads: "Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans." Again, probably, the text was taken to mean that Haran died in the fire (*ʾur*) of the Chaldeans, so that Nimrod now becomes guilty of the death of Abraham's brother.

Another new element found in *Tg. Pseudo-Jonathan* is the identification of Nimrod with Amraphel, one of the kings mentioned in Genesis 14. On Gen 14:1 this targum remarks that Amraphel was the same as Nimrod who had said that Abraham should be thrown into the fire, obviously with an etymological play on *ʾamar* and *hippil* (or *pil*). The real reason behind this identification, however, may have been that Amraphel is said in the biblical text to have been "King of Shinar" in the days of Abraham. But, of course, the king of Shinar in Abraham's time was known to have been Nimrod. One could find corroborative evidence for this identification in the folk-etymological analysis of the name Amraphel: *ʾamar pil*, "he said: 'throw!'" This etymological derivation is discussed explicitly in the Talmud (see below). *Tg. Onqelos* does not yield much of relevance for our purpose apart from the fact that Nimrod here is called "a powerful potentate" (*gibbar taqip*), perhaps because the translator associated the Hebrew *ṣayid* with *meṣudah*, "stronghold, fortress."[88] *Tg. Neofiti* on Gen 10:9 calls Nimrod "a hero in sin before the Lord." And the Fragment Targum *ad loc* has: "He was very mighty at the hunt and mighty in sin before the Lord.

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able traditions regarding Nimrod and does not deduce any "rebelliousness" from the name Nimrod, but explains that Nimrod was the first man to show the prowess of man over beast and that he built altars on which he offered burnt offerings to God. Ibn Ezra was censured for that by Nachmanides (ibid., 201–2).

[87]Translation and discussion of this passage in Bowker, *Targums*, 183, 187–88.

[88]Thus Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988) 61. Cf. also Moshe Aberbach and Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1982) 69–70.

He would trap men by their tongues (i.e., words) and say to them: Depart from the laws of Shem and cling to the laws of Nimrod."[89] Here we see that "hunter" is understood metaphorically as one who knows how to ensnare people; that is why he is called "mighty in sin" or "a hero in sin." This expression recurs in the targum on 1 Chr 1:10; and the same targum on 28:3 says that God saved Abraham from the fiery furnace into which Nimrod had thrown him because he would not worship his idol.[90] Let me quote finally from the targum to Qoh 4:13:

> Better like Abraham, the poor youth in whom was the spirit of prophecy from the Lord and to whom the Lord was known when he was three years old, and he would not worship an idol, than the wicked Nimrod, who was an old and foolish king. And because Abraham would not worship an idol, he threw him into the burning furnace, and a miracle was performed for him from the Lord of the world, and he delivered him from it. Even after this, Nimrod had no sense to be admonished not to worship the idol which he worshipped before. For Abraham went out from the family of idolaters and reigned over the land of Canaan, and during Abraham's reign Nimrod became destitute in the world.[91]

More targumic passages could be added, but these suffice to show the growth of a tradition in the period from the second to the seventh centuries of our era.

When we turn to Talmud and midrashim, some new details are added to the picture, but basically the story remains the same.[92] In *b. ʿErubin* 53a we read:

> "And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel" (Gen 14:1). Rav and Samuel are at variance. One holds that his name was Nimrod; and

[89]See Michael L. Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch* (2 vols.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980) 1. 49 and 2. 11. Roger le Déaut, *Targum du Pentateuque* 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1978) 136–39. Michael L. Klein's *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (2 vols.; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986) has no material on Nimrod.

[90]Roger le Déaut and Jean Robert, *Targum des Chroniques* (AnBib 51; 2 vols.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971) 1. 40, 156; 2. 9, 142.

[91]Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Qohelet* (New York: Sepher Hermon, 1978) 34. Cf. Levine's *Aramaic Version of the Bible*, 184–85 n. 13.

[92]Older surveys can be found in B. Beer, *Leben Abraham's nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage* (Leipzig: Leiner, 1859) 7–19 with notes on pp. 105–16. M. Seligmann, "Nimrod," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 9 (1905) 309. M. J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden* (4 vols.;

> why was he called Amraphel? Because he ordered our father Abraham to be cast into a burning furnace (*še'amar wehippil le'Avraham 'avinu betokh kivšan ha'eš*). But the other holds that his name was Amraphel; and why was he called Nimrod? Because in his reign he led all the world in rebellion against himself [=God] (*šehimrid 'et kol ha'olam kullo 'alav bemalkhuto*).

We see here two more instances of the etymologies already known to us. The motif that Nimrod led the whole world to rebellion against God is also found in *b. Pesaḥ.* 94b and *b. Ḥag.* 13a, where Nebuchadnezzar is called a "grandson of Nimrod," i.e., Nimrod's spiritual descendant because of his rebellion against God and his attempt to force other people into the same attitude.[93] In *b. 'Aboda Zar.* 3a we read: "The Holy One, blessed be He, will say: 'Some of yourselves shall testify that Israel has observed the entire Torah. Let Nimrod come and testify that Abraham did not worship idols.'" (In *'Aboda Zar.* 53b the tower of Babel is called "the house/temple of Nimrod" and regarded as an idol that its worshipers abandoned.) A nice haggadic trait is found in *b. Pesaḥ.* 118a, where it is said:

> When the wicked Nimrod cast our father Abraham into the fiery furnace, Gabriel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the universe, let me go down, cool [it], and deliver that righteous man from the fiery furnace." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "I am unique in my world and he is unique in his world; it is fitting for Him who is unique to deliver him who is unique." But because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not withhold the [merited] reward of any creature, He said to him: "Thou shalt be privileged to deliver three of his descendants" [sc. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azaryah].

Frankfurt: Ritter und Loening, 1913–1927) 2. 17–25, 56–59, 73–74, 103–24, 160–61. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909) 1. 174–217 with notes in vol. 5 (1925) 198–218. A. S. Rappoport, *Ancient Israel: Myths and Legends* I (reprinted London: Mystic, 1987) 226–53. See also the short notice by the editor in the *EncJud* 12 (1972) 1167.

[93]The etymological play with *mrd* is also found in connection with 1 Chr 4:18, "the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered took," about which it is remarked in *b. Meg* 13a: "Was Mered his name? Was not Caleb his name [cf. 1 Chr 4:15]? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Let Caleb, who rebelled (*marad*) against the plan of the spies, come and take the daughter of Pharaoh, who rebelled against the idols of her father's house.' " There can be little doubt that Jerome goes back to Jewish etymological speculations when, in his *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum,* he quotes as meanings of the name Nimrod: *tyrannus, profugus, transgressor, apostata* [P. de Lagarde, ed., *Onomastica Sacra* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1870) 9, 52; also (CCSL 72; Turnhout: Brepols, 1959) 69, 124].

To conclude this brief talmudic anthology, in *b. Ḥull.* 89a God says: "I bestowed greatness upon Nimrod, but he said, 'Come, let us build a city'" (Gen 11:4). Here is a final trace of an image of Nimrod as a man initially bestowed with favors by God but later corrupted by his lust for power. On the whole, the Talmud adds no really new elements to the Nimrod-haggada.

Some new elements can be found in the haggadic midrashim, especially in *Gen. Rabba*, as is to be expected. In *Gen. Rab.* 23.7 (on 4:26), it is said that the word *begin* or *beginning* is used four times in the text of Genesis (4:26; 6:1; 10:8; 11:6) in the sense of rebelling. Two of these passages are about Nimrod, also 11:6, on the basis of which text it is said that God smote Nimrod's head, exclaiming: "It is he who has incited them to rebel." (The same tradition in *Gen. Rab.* 26.4, on 6:1.) This application of the hermeneutic rule of analogy is a new element supporting the growing tradition of Nimrod as the archrebel against God. In this midrash we also find a parallel drawn between Esau and Nimrod in *Gen. Rab.* 37.2–3 and 63.13. Of course, this is due to the fact that in Gen 25:27 it is said that "Esau was a skillful hunter." This suggested a rivalry between the two. In the latter passage it is said that "Nimrod was seeking to slay him [Esau] on account of the garment which had belonged to Adam [and which Esau now possessed], for whenever he put it on and went into the field, all the beasts and birds in the world would come and flock around him."

Elsewhere (e.g., *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 24), we find the reverse situation, namely that Nimrod has received via his forefathers the garments of skin that God had made for Adam (Gen 3:21) from Ham, who had stolen them out of the ark of Noah; when Esau saw them, he became jealous because Nimrod's success in hunting was due to the fact that he wore these coats of skin that made the animals prostrate before him. Hence he slew Nimrod.[94]

In *Gen. Rab.* 38.13 (on 11:28) we find the motif that Nimrod proposes to Abraham: "Let us worship the fire." This is followed by a long discussion between the two, resulting in Abraham's being thrown into the fire and being saved, whereas Haran dies in the same fire. The motif of fire worship is interesting, since we know from other sources that Nimrod was sometimes identified with Zoroaster who was regarded as the one who introduced the worship of fire. In these same sources we also see that Nimrod-Zoroaster is viewed as the originator of astrology and magic.[95]

[94]The elaboration of this theme can best be studied in the extensive Nimrod haggada in the *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which we leave out of account here since we want to limit the discussion to ancient sources. For the late date of *Sefer ha-Yashar* see Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1982) 300.

[95]See Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

Although testimonies about Nimrod as the originator of fire worship and star worship are found in Christian sources, especially the Pseudo-Clementine *Homiliae* 9.4–5 (cf. the *Recognitiones* 1.30) and the so-called *Cave of the Treasures* 27,[96] there can be little doubt that the identification of Nimrod and Zoroaster had a Jewish origin. Bousset has aptly remarked:

> After a certain point, it also must have seemed to the Jews of the Babylonian lowlands that [Zoroaster] was the creator of the pagan religion that dominated the region, indeed, that he was the most famous and outstanding of all the founders of pagan religions. Consequently, Zoroaster also became for them a Babylonian, creator of Babylonian wisdom, and leader of the Chaldeans. From there it was only a step to the identification Zoroaster-Nimrod. The figure of Nimrod, so familiar to Jewish legend, and the figure of the founder of the Persian religion, the religion ruling in the Babylonian lowlands, henceforth flow together, and although it appears at first glance like the fantasy of some lazy mind, in the identification Nimrod-Zoroaster we have a last distant echo of a tremendously important event in the history of religion, namely the incursion of the Persian religion into the Babylonian lowlands.[97]

More could be said about this fascinating identification, but space does not permit us to do so here. Anyway, it is clear that the image of Nimrod

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1907, repr. 1973) 144ff. esp. 369–78. Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystape d'après la tradition grecque* (2 vols.; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1938) 1. 42–44; 2. 50–55, 60–61, 120–25. Karl Preisendanz, "Nimrod (1)," *PW* 17 (1936) 624–27. Hans J. Schoeps, *Aus frühchristlicher Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1950) 19–24. On the early medieval traditions about Nimrod as astrologer, see C. H. Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924) 336–45. Bidez and Cumont (*Mages*, 2. 60–61) and Preisendanz ("Nimrod," 625) also discuss the identification of Nimrod with Orion, a giant and hunter (!) from Greek mythology, in some late sources; I leave this out of account for reasons of space and because this identification probably does not have a Jewish origin.

[96]Cf. also the following remark by Epiphanius, *Panarion* 1.3, 2–3: "Nimrod, the son of Cush the Ethiopian, the father of Asshur, ruled as a king. (. . .) The Greeks say that he is Zoroaster and that he went on further east and became the pioneer settler of Bactria. (3) Every transgression in the world was disseminated at this time, for Nimrod was an originator of wrong teaching, astrology and magic, which is what some say of Zoroaster. But in actual fact this was the time of Nimrod the giant; the two, Nimrod and Zoroaster, are far apart in time" (F. Williams, trans., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book I* [Leiden: Brill, 1987] 16–17).

[97]Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, 377. Cf. Schoeps's careful remark (*Aus frühchristlicher Zeit*, 32): "Die Identifikation Nimrod-Zoroaster könnte bereits rabbinisch sein."

as the archrebel against God lent itself easily to identification with a person who in a certain religio-historical constellation could be regarded as the founder of paganism *par excellence*, in this case the influential Zoroaster.

Let us return to the midrashim. In *Qoh. Rab.* 2.14.1, the biblical proverb "The wise man, his eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness" is interpreted as alluding to Abraham and Nimrod. The element of darkness is reminiscent of Philo's description of Nimrod as the black one who does not participate in the light (and cf. also *Gen. Rab.* 42.4 where Nimrod is called a Cushite, i.e., Ethiopian, because his father was Cush). In *Deut. Rab.* 2.27 the ministering angels declare before God,

> "Lo, he [Abraham] is standing before Amraphel, lo, his sentence is being pronounced, lo, he is about to be burned." God replied: "I will protect him." When he was cast into the fiery furnace, God came down and delivered him. Whence this? For it is said: "I am the Lord that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees." (Gen 15:7)

In other haggadic midrashim are passages dealing with Abraham's being persecuted or sentenced to death or thrown into the fire by Nimrod, about Nimrod (=Amraphel) being defeated by Abraham, etc., but they do not add to our knowledge of the haggada we have already seen.[98]

The development does not stop at the end of antiquity. A look at *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* and especially at *Sepher ha-Yashar* reveals that Nimrod continued to quicken the imagination. This development went on not only in Jewish but also in Christian and especially in Islamic circles.[99] Several of the minor midrashim in Jellinek's collection even stand under the suspicion of being influenced by Islamic Nimrod legends.[100] Be that as it may, the material surveyed allows some provisional conclusions to be drawn about the developments of the Nimrod haggada and the reasons behind that process.

Haggada in which Nimrod is mentioned explicitly is found for the first time in the first century CE. But since we know from *Jubilees*, from Pseudo-Eupolemus, and from Philo the epic poet, that already in the sec-

[98]More passages on Nimrod in the haggadic midrashim can be found in the Index Volume to the Soncino translation of the Midrash Rabba. See *Shir ha-Shirim Rab.* 8.8.2; *Vayyiqra Rab.* 27.5, 28.4, 36.4; *Midrash Tehillim* 24.8; *Pesiqta Rabbati* 18.3, 33.4; *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 8.2; *Tanhuma, Lekh lekha* 2; etc.

[99]See besides the surveys mentioned in n. 23, esp. the dissertation by H. Schützinger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der arabischen Abraham-Nimrod-Legende* (Ph.D. diss., Bonn, 1962).

[100]See Adolf Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrasch*, 1. 25–34 (Ma'aseh 'Avraham 'Avinu = August Wünsche, *Aus Israels Lehrhallen* 1. 14–34), 2. 188–19 (Ma'aseh 'Avraham 'Avinu = Wünsche

ond century BCE there was Abraham haggada in which a connection had been made between Abraham and the giants, between the tower of Babel and the giants, and between the tower of Babel and Abraham, it is hardly thinkable that the Nimrod connection was made only two centuries later. Presumably it is accidental and due only to the vicissitudes of fortune that no texts with Nimrod haggada prior to the turn of the era have been preserved. The fact, however, that once such haggada turns up in the first century CE Nimrod is not yet the sole antagonist of Abraham, but only one of many, seems to indicate that the growth of Nimrod into the archrebel against God was a gradual process. The absence of Nimrod in the writings from Qumran seems to point in the same direction.

Various factors were at work in this process. Most probably the earliest factor was the circumstance that the biblical text called Nimrod a *gibbor/ gigas*, using the same word as in Gen 6:4 for the offspring of the rebelling sons of God. In addition was the fact that Nimrod's kingdom was in Babel in the land of Shinar according to Genesis 10, where also the tower was built according to Genesis 11, which seemed to leave no other possibility than that Nimrod built the tower. Once Babel and Ur Kaśdim were identified and *ʾur kaśdim* was taken to mean "the fiery furnace of the Chaldees," Abraham must of course have met his famous contemporary and compatriot, and this meeting could only have been an inimical confrontation, resulting in Abraham's miraculous delivery from the fire (on the basis of Gen 15:7). That there must have been such a confrontation was confirmed by the biblical text of Genesis 14, which mentions a war between Abraham and several kings among whom was the king of Shinar whose name, Amraphel, indicated that he had said to throw Abraham into the furnace. This same king was of course also responsible for the death of Abraham's brother, Haran, who did die in Ur Kaśdim (Gen 11:28). Finally, Nimrod's bad character was made clear by his own name, which indicated beyond any doubt that he was a rebel (*mrd*) against the Lord, and by the word "hunter" that was also used for his competitor Esau; and for Greek-speaking Jews also by the expression "a hunter before=*enantion*=against the Lord." So we see that in the post-biblical exposition of these few biblical verses a wide range of haggadic potential is brought to fruition.

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1. 42–45), 5. 40–41 (Midrash de ʾAvraham ʾAvinu = Wünsche 1. 46–47). References to other medieval sources can be found in Moses Gaster, *The Exempla of the Rabbis* (1924; reprinted New York: Ktav, 1968) 185. For a discussion of medieval manuscript illustrations to Nimrod haggada see K. Appel, "Abraham als dreijähriger Knabe im Feuerofen des Nimrod," *Kairos* 25 (1983) 36–40.

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