

## SEVEN.

BY THE EDITOR.

SEVEN is a sacred number in many religions, especially in the Zarathustrian faith of the *Zend Avesta* and in the Mithras religion, but also among the Buddhists, the Jews and the Christians.



THE SEVEN IGHIGS, OR CELESTIAL GENII.

Appearing in the second row of an ancient bronze tablet. Representing Chaldæan religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

Its sacredness is as old as history and dates back to the beginning of civilisation in both Akkad and Egypt.

The ancient Babylonians believed in seven great gods, in

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Lenormant. The original is in the collection of M. de Clercq.

seven celestial spirits, called *ighigs*, and seven spirits of the underworld, called Anunnaki.<sup>1</sup> Bel Merodach combated and conquered seven wicked storm-demons. Hell (the underworld) has seven gates; magic formulæ must be repeated seven times in order to be efficient, and the great epic of the formation of the world was written on seven tablets, corresponding to the seven days' work of the creation account in Genesis.

The seven great gods were associated with the seven planets, who were worshipped as the rulers of the world in the great Temple at Babylon, the ruins of which are now called Birs Nimrud. Mr. Robert E. Anderson says<sup>2</sup>:

"The famous mound, Birs Nimrud, has been proved to be the ruins of the 'Temple of the Seven Spheres,' a national structure finally rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar the Great, who informs us that the original tower had existed many ages previously. The entire height of this temple was only 156 feet, but the general



THE SEVEN GREAT GODS OF THE CHALDÆANS. (Bas-Relief of Malaija.)<sup>3</sup>

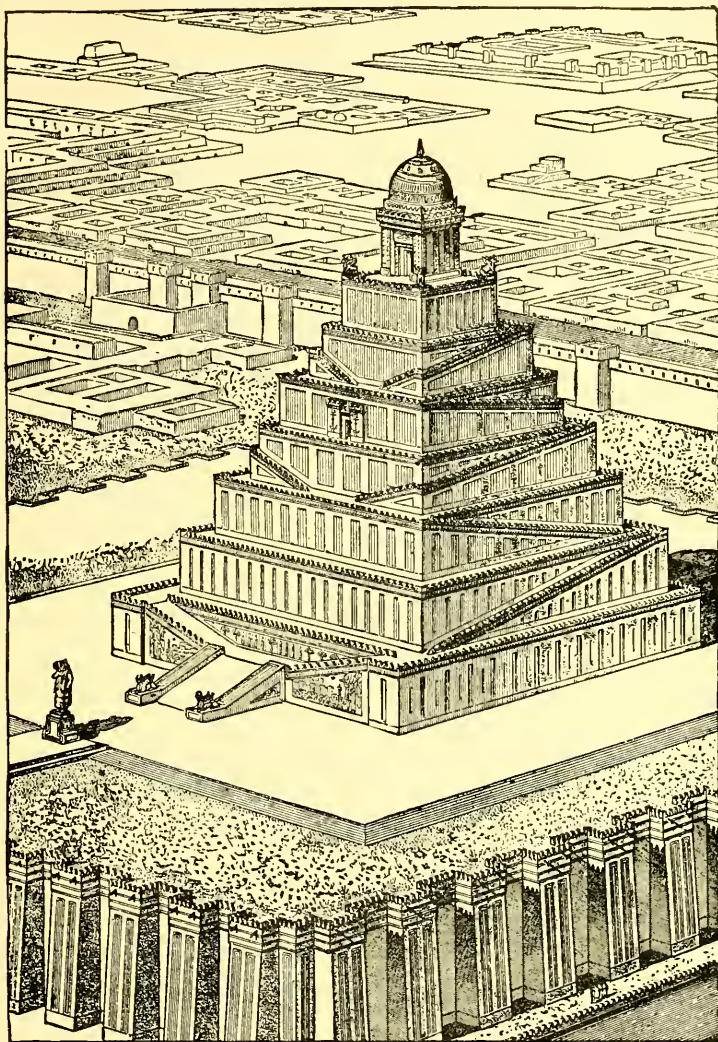
effect of its appearance would be very striking to any modern observer, since each of the seven stages was a mass of one color different from all the others, and representing symbolically one of 'seven stars of heaven.' The first, Saturn, black, the masonry being covered with bitumen; the second, Jupiter, orange, by a facing of orange bricks; the third, Mars, blood-red, by bricks of that color; the fourth,

<sup>1</sup> The Ighigs or Igigi are similar to the Hebrew archangels. Their name means "the strong ones" and they are closely associated with the seven Anunnaki. Jastrow characterises them as follows: "In Babylonian hymns and incantations the Igigi and Anunnaki play a very prominent part. Anu is represented as the father of both groups. But they are also at the service of other gods, notably of Bel, who is spoken of as their 'lord,' of Ninib, of Marduk, of Ishtar, and of Nergal. They prostrate themselves before these superior masters, and the latter at times manifest their anger against the Igigi. They are sent out by the gods to do service. Their character is, on the whole, severe and cruel. They are not favorable to man, but rather hostile to him. Their brilliancy consumes the land. Their power is feared, and Assyrian kings more particularly are fond of adding the Igigi and Anunnaki to the higher powers—the gods proper—when they wish to inspire a fear of their own majesty."

<sup>2</sup> *The Story of Extinct Civilisations*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> Reproduced from *Mith. aus d. Or. Samml. zu Berlin*, XI., p. 23. Cf. Roscher's *Lexicon*, v. Nebo.

the Sun, covered with plates of gold; the fifth, Venus, pale yellow, by suitable bricks; the sixth, Mercury, blue, by vitrification, the whole stage having been subjected to intense heat after building; the seventh stage, the Moon, probably covered with plates of silver."



THE SEVEN-STORIED ZIGGURAT<sup>1</sup> AT BABYLON, COMMONLY CALLED BIRS NIMRUD.  
Restored after Perrot and Chipier.

A reminiscence of the idea that the celestial bodies are governors is still preserved in the Old Testament, which in comparison

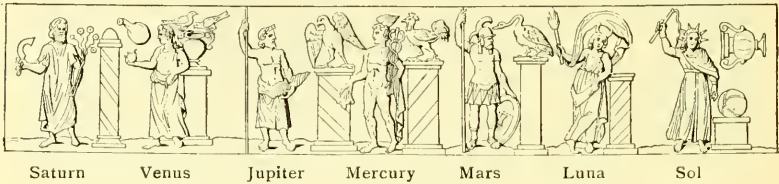
<sup>1</sup>Ziggurat means "mountain peak."



with the cuneiform inscriptions of ancient Babylonia is a quite recent production. There we read in Genesis i. that "God made two great lights, the greater light to *rule* the day and the lesser light to *rule* the night, and he made the stars also . . . to *rule* over the day and over the night," etc.—Gen. i. 16 and 18.

The Syrian Gnosis, however, (if the scholarly investigation of Anz<sup>1</sup> can be relied upon,) has faithfully preserved the Babylonian traditions, for there the planetary spirits are still called the rulers (*ἄρχοντες*), and the soul must learn the secret of appeasing them in order to pass without molestation through the seven celestial spheres to the abode of eternal bliss.

In the *Zend Avesta* as in Babylonia the sacredness of the number seven is based upon the connexion in which astronomy stood to the religion of ancient Iran. The seven planets were regarded as the seven deities, who, with the rise of monotheism, which made Ahura Mazda, the Lord Omniscient, sole God throughout the universe, were changed into archangels, or the ruling spirits of the heavens.



THE SEVEN GODS PRESIDING OVER THE SEVEN DAYS OF THE WEEK.  
(After the *Gaz. arch.*, 1879, i.)

The number seven is popular among all the nations of the world because of the number of the days of the week, which are the fourth part of the circuit of the moon round the earth. The moon is the natural calendar of man, and its phases offer the most convenient mode of calculating time and determining dates. Now the sidereal month consists of 27 days, 7 hours, and 43 minutes, nearly; the synodical month, i. e., from new moon to new moon, is longer, being 29 days, 12 hours, and 44 minutes, nearly; which yields an average of 28 days, and this condition gave rise to the institution of the week.

The week is among many nations a religious institution. So it was in ancient Rome and every day was presided over by a special deity.

The progress of the sun in the region of the fixed stars during

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Anz, *Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung des Gnosticismus*, Leipzig, 1897.

the twelve months led to a division of the heavens into twelve houses or mansions, which constitute the zodiac; and this is the reason why the number twelve is either closely connected with seven or placed in contrast to it.

Ezekiel, the Hebrew prophet (Chap. ix) speaks in his remarkable vision of six men, every one holding in his hand a slaughter weapon and of another man with a writer's inkhorn by his side. Our Bible version speaks of him as "among the six" as though he were one of them, but Hebrew scholars (Smend, Cornill, Berthelot) interpret the passage in the sense that the man in linen who has not a slaughter weapon but an inkhorn is to be added to the other six, and Gunkel recognises in the vision a reminiscence of the seven great planetary gods of the Babylonians. In his excavations at Nippur, Hilprecht has discovered many traces of the exiled Jews and Ezekiel is full of allusions to Babylonian thought and religion. The man with the inkhorn, clothed in linen after the fashion of Babylonian priests, is no other than Nebo, the god of learning and the tutelary deity of priestcraft, represented by the planet Mercury (8).

Ancient Egyptian cubit sticks (the oldest measuring rods still extant) are divided into seven palms, and as seven has been one of the most awkward numbers for purposes of measurement, we must assume that this division is due to the reverence for this oddest of the prime numbers.

The same is true of the rainbow whose division into seven colors is not founded upon fact, but betrays only the popular preference for a number deemed sacred.

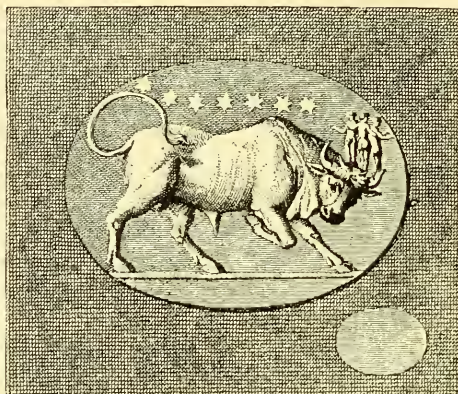
It is a strange coincidence that the human head is furnished with seven apertures, two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and one mouth; but it is obviously far-fetched to think that this is the reason for the sacredness of the number seven.

The number seven is sacred also to the prehistoric man, the savage; for our tri-dimensional space offers six directions in every place, which, including its centre, constitutes seven worlds, situated in the seven regions, one here in the place where man lives, four regions in the four quarters and two more, one in the zenith of heaven and the other in the nadir underground. Major John W. Powell in his *Lessons of Folklore* explains the subject as follows:

"Every tribe believes itself to inhabit the center of the world; thus we have a zenith world, a midworld, and a nadir world. Then they speak of a world to the north, of a world to the south, of a world to the east, and of a world to the west, for men think of the world in terms of the cardinal points. Chained to this mode

of thinking by the terms of language, the three worlds are multiplied and *seven* worlds are known: the midworld, the under world, the upper world, the north world, the south world, the east world, and the west world. All tribal peoples, savage and barbaric alike, believe in these seven worlds as departments or pavilions to the world of firmament and earth."

Under these circumstances we need not wonder that a great number of arbitrary enumerations fixed themselves upon the num-



DIONYSIAN BULL WITH SEVEN PLEIADES.  
Ancient gem. From Baumeister's *Denkmäler*.

ber seven. We have seven sages in Greece, seven argonauts and seven wonders of the world. The Pleiades which happen to consist of seven stars of great intensity are deemed a constellation of special significance and power.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]