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ADAPA, GENESIS, AND THE NOTION OF FAITH*

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The best preserved manuscript of the Akkadian myth of Adapa is a tablet found in Egypt, in the Amarna archives, together with the correspondence sent to 18th dynasty Pharaohs from Syria and beyond. The text was part and parcel of the scribal tradition on which the royal courts relied for the training of adequate interpreters of the diplomatic lingua franca of the period, Akkadian. To this end, next to instruction in the bare rudiments of the language, based on syllabaries and vocabularies, the teachers were also utilizing a corpus of Mesopotamian literary texts, such as, precisely, Adapa. The influence of these texts was most likely to be felt not only on the linguistic, but also on the cultural level: concepts and formulations were more apt to be assimilated and borrowed from one culture to the other through the intermediary of the scribal school, and as a result transference of Mesopotamian conceptions and literary topoi can be more easily understood because often traceable through written evidence. As for Adapa, there seems to be, at first reading, no reverberation of its themes in the later traditions of Syria and Palestine, specifically in the Old Testament (note that, on the basis of the evidence from Amarna and elsewhere, it is legitimate to assume that the Syro-Palestinian scribes too, no less than their Egyptian counterparts, were familiar with Mesopotamian literary texts, which probably served as common instructional tools in the courts throughout the West – witness, for instance, the Megiddo Gilgamesh tablet). Upon careful consideration, however, connections with Syrian traditions seem possible also for Adapa;[1] my interpretation, resting in part on a new understanding of some aspects of the myth itself, will form the basis of the present paper.

The protagonist of the myth, it will be remembered, is summoned by Anu to justify himself for having "broken the wing of the South wind" (*ša Šūti kappaša ištebir*, 11 f.[2]). Adapa ist advised by his father, the bene-

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1 Recently, connections between our myth and the Old Testament have been suggested by A.S. Van der Woude, "De *Mal'ak Jahweh*: een Godsbode," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 18 (1963-64) 7-8: reference is made to the fact that Anu (as often Yahweh in the Old Testament) sends his messenger (*mār šipri*) down from heaven to deal with earthly matters.

2 All references to the Adapa text, unless otherwise indicated, are to the edition by J.A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, *VAB* II/1, Leipzig 1915, pp. 964-69; quotes are by line number.

volent god Ea, on how to avoid the wrath of Anu. He is to endear himself to two gods he will find at Anu's gate, Tammuz and Gizzida, by presenting himself to them in mourning garb and claiming that the reason for his mourning is their having disappeared from earth. Touched by his concern for their fate, they will be induced to "speak a good word to Anu" (*amāta damiqta ana Ani iqabbū*, 26 f.)[3] and Anu in turn will become favorably disposed to Adapa's cause. Besides suggesting this stratagem, Ea also warns Adapa not to accept the deadly bread and water (*akala ša mūti, mē mūti*, 29 f.), which Anu is going to offer him, no objection, however, is raised to Adapa's accepting a new garment and oil with which to anoint himself. The narrative continues with an instant replay of what Ea had predicted, and Adapa follows to the letter his father's admonitions – with one, interesting variation: what Anu offers to Adapa is, in Anu's words, "bread of life" (*akal balāṭi*, 60 f.) and "water of life" (*mē balāṭi*, 62), not, as Ea had anticipated, bread and water of death. In spite of the change which affects, as it seems, the nature of the food offerings, Adapa refuses to accept them, remaining true to Ea's command. At this, Anu breaks into laughter (*iṣṣīḫ ina muḫḫīšu*, 66),[4] and asks him why would he refuse bread and water. The reply comes without hesitation: "Ea, my lord, told me: 'Thou shalt not eat, thou shalt not drink!'" (*Ea, bēlī, iqbā: Lā takkal, lā tašattī*, 68 f.). Adapa, in other words, construes Ea's command as a simple prohibition not to eat or drink *without qualifications*, i.e. regardless of whether food and water were deadly or lifegiving. Adapa's explanation is followed abruptly by another command of Anu: "Take him to his earth!" (*Liq[āš]u-m[a te]rrāšu ana qaqqarīšu*!, 70) – and here the Amarna tablet breaks off.

* * *

The refusal of Adapa is one of the problems in the interpretation of the text. A number of suggestions has been advanced by various scholars. (1) Is Ea in effect a trickster god, whose prohibition is simply a joke played on naive Adapa, since with a little more cunning the latter could have obtained that eternal life which Anu was purportedly offering him?[5] And is then Anu's laughter a rejoinder of Ea's joke? Or (2) was Ea's plan tricky, yes, but for better motives, namely in order to avoid that Adapa, having partaken of the food, be prevented from returning to earth?[6] Or (3) is Ea's prohibition calculated to prevent that Adapa, returning to earth as an immortal, should change the nature of things by rendering all of mankind immortal?[7] Or again (4) was Ea simply incapable of foreseeing the change of heart of Anu, who is unpredictably induced to give complete absolution to the culprit and even offer him life?[8] Or, finally, (5) is Ea, the god of water, intentionally trying to punish Adapa who, by halting the beneficent influence of the wind, had prevented the normal growth of vegetation?[9]

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[3] This appears as the ideological transposition, within a mythical context, of a topos recurrent in the actual practice of the Amarna scribes, see A.L. Oppenheim, "A Note on the Scribes in Mesopotamia," *Studies Landsberger*, *AS* 16, Chicago 1965, p. 255.

[4] In one of the textual fragment from Asshurbanipal's library, Anu laughs at Ea (K 8214, Fragment D, 1). On the laughter of Anu see G. Komoróczy, "Zur Deutung der altbabylonischen Epen Adapa und Etana," *Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der alten Welt*, I, Berlin 1964, p. 32 with n. 9; F.M.Th. De Liagre Böhl, "Mythos und Geschichte in der altbabylonischen Dichtung," *Opera Minora*, Groningen 1953, p. 233.

[5] F.M.Th. De Liagre Böhl, "Die Mythen vom weisen Adapa," *WO* II/5-6 (1959) 418.

[6] E. Burrows, "Note on Adapa," *Or.* 30 (1928) 24.

[7] Th. Jacobsen, "The Investiture and Anointing of Adapa in Heaven," *AJSL* 46 (1930) 203, reprinted in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, Cambridge 1970, p. 50.

[8] G. Furlani, "Il mito di Adapa," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, VI/5 (1929) 160; G. Castellino, *Mitologia sumerico-accadica*, Torino 1967, p. 130; Böhl, "Die Mythen," p. 418.

[9] G. Roux, "Adapa, le vent et l'eau," *RA* 55 (1961) 31. Cf. also A. Draffkorn Kilmer, "How was Queen Ereshkigal tricked? A new Interpretation of the Descent of Ishtar," *UF* 3 (1971) 306.

All of these interpretations presuppose that Ea did in fact have in mind to trick Adapa, or else that he was not smart enough to foresee the correct sequence of events. But if one has to pit Ea's word (bread and water are deadly) against Anu's (bread and water are lifegiving), I would choose, with Adapa, Ea's word. This is certainly in line with the traditional attitude in Babylonian mythology, whereby the listener's sympathy is normally channeled toward Ea and away from the supreme gods, notably Anu and Enlil – as in Atram-hasīs, Gilgamesh XI or Inanna's Descent. The most important consideration in this respect is to be derived from the immediate context of our myth. As I have noted before, Adapa's reply to Anu makes no mention of whether he expected life or death from the bread and water offered him by Anu. The stress is on Ea's command as such, without qualifications: Adapa says that he was not supposed to eat or drink *tout court*, without being impressed by the apparent contradiction between Ea's description of bread and water on the one hand, and Anu's on the other. Besides, it is also interesting to note that Adapa calls Ea "my lord" while speaking to Anu, almost claiming a special relationship with Ea which seems daring in front of the other god, as if thereby Adapa were excluding Anu from a similar recognition. This is, I would submit, one of the few cases where Babylonian mythology presents us with a phenomenon of what one may properly call "faith". Adapa has a personal relationship with Ea which prompts him to bear witness to his god even in front of other gods and even at the risk of dangerous consequences. It is not, in other words, a generic belief in Ea's existence and protection, but a personal commitment, not swayed by the contrasting intervention of another supernatural being. The only other examples of such faith or personal commitment to a god are found, if I see well, in the story of the flood: and interestingly enough, in this context too the god who prompts such a response in man is Ea – both with Atram-hasīs and with Ut-napishtim. In the flood stories there is no direct confrontation with another god, but we do have the element of abnormality which serves as a test of faith: in both versions, Ea's worshipper prepares the boat without asking why, and is concerned only about the reaction of this fellow men, asking Ea for advice on how to deal with them. In addition, both Adapa and the flood stories involve not only the same god, Ea, but also comparable phenomena of cosmic magnitude: the destructive flood in one instance, and, in the other, the drought resulting from the disappearance of the south wind.[10]

If Ea does not trick Adapa, what is the reason for the prohibition? With Böhl,[11] I would consider it possible to admit that any otherwordly food was thought of as lethal for the non-initiated:[12] the prohibition then is similar to that which obtains for someone going to the netherworld who does not belong there, as with Nergal who, on his way to Ereshkigal, is similarly warned by Ea not to partake of any food.[13] It is important to note that Anu's rebuttal of Adapa does not contain any reference to the possibility of the hero's acquiring eternal life.[14] The text says: *Ammīni lā tākul, lā taltī-ma lā balṭāt*[*a*]? (67f.), which can be interpreted, as I see it, as a deliberately ambiguous sentence. In one case, the verb *balāṭu* has the sense, common in the Amarna correspondence,[15] of "invigorating," hence the translation would be: "Why din't you eat and drink, as a result of which now (*-ma*) you are not in strength (to start on your journey back)? " In the other case, the verb *balāṭu* retains the basic meaning of "being alive," and then Anu displays his real intention to punish Adapa: "Why didn't you

[10] On this last point see Roux, "Adapa," 15-19.

[11] Böhl, "Die Mythe," p. 426; but see Roux, "Adapa."

[12] Kilmer's ("Queen Ereshkigal") convincing argumentation concerning the custom of hospitality in Mesopotamia (as well as the earlier remarks in a similar vein by Jacobsen, "Investiture") may still hold true: Anu would then have offered food and drink following the rule of hospitality – this rule not being violated if the food, in virtue of its being the food of the gods, would turn out to be harmful, in fact lethal, for human consumption. Nor does Adapa's refusal go against the dictates of custom, just as it does not in the case of Aṣūšu-namir who, in Ishtar's Descent, refuses the food that is offered and asks instead for something else (Kilmer, "Queen Ereshkigal," p. 304).

[13] O. Gurney, *An. St.* 10 (1960) 105-31 = *STT* II ii 41'-43' = A.K. Grayson, *ANET*^{3}, p. 509.

[14] See on this subject Furlani, "Mito," 163 f.; Komoróczy, "Deutung," p. 38.

[15] *CAD* 8 55 f.

eat and drink, as a result of which (*-ma*) you would not have stayed alive (because the food would have been lethal)? " The semantic polyvalence of *balāṭu* covers up, with the deceivingly kind concern of the first alternative, the rude reality of the second. Having avoided Anu's first attempt to punish him, Adapa is not subjected to a second; owing it in part to the "good word" of Tammuz and Gizzida, he is set free, even at the cost of Anu's nervousness. For the laughter of Anu is not the result of amusement, but rather of anger, similar to the laughter which, in Atram-hasīs overcomes Enki when the gods are assembled to approve Enlil's plans for the flood: "Enki got fed up with sitting down, in the assembly of the gods laughter consumed him" ([*Enki*] *ītašuš ašābam*, [*ina pu*]*ḫri ša ilī ṣiḫtum īkulšu*).[16] Here Enki reacts with a hysteric outpour of emotions at the plans of the gods which leave him indignant and defiant, while in the Myth of Adapa Anu expresses, with a similar reaction, his indignation and impatience at being fooled by Ea through Adapa.

Ea had proscribed food and drink, but had allowed Adapa, once in heaven, to put on new garments and to anoint himself with oil. The reasons for forbidding one thing and allowing another are readily found. Adapa had presented himself in heaven under the guise of a mourner; the sign of mourning, by his own admission, consisted exclusively of the special garment he was wearing: "In the land two gods have disappeared so I, for one, am dressed in mourning clothes" (*ina māti ilū šenā ḫalqū-ma anāku karra labšāku*, 43 f.). To his surprise (no matter if feigned) he finds Tammuz and Gizzida, the very gods for whom he had been mourning, alive and well. No reason, therefore, to continue his mourning: this had come to an end, he could clean himself and put on new robes. Adapa could expect his host to provide him with oil and garments for this occasion, a custom attested elsewhere in the Mesopotamian tradition.[17] Ea not only would not want to prevent this, he had actually planned the situation: Adapa's good will in mourning the two gods whose disappearance he had himself brough about (following in this Roux's convincing interpretation[18]) would not only endear him to the two gods, but also propitiate Anu, who was sensitive to the value of spontaneous penance.[19] So for Adapa to accept garments and oil meant to accept the end of his mourning.

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From the first modern publications of the Myth of Adapa, this figure has been compared with that of Adam – and just as often the comparison has been questioned and rejected.[20] In the light of the interpretation just suggested, I would like to repropose the same comparison, but for different reasons and with different limitations. (1) A first similarity is in the situation of the two men, since both are faced with the prohibition to partake of a certain food. The formulation of Ea's command is close to that of Genesis. "The food of death . . . you must not eat" (*akala ša mūti . . lā takkal*, 29 f.) says Ea, and Yahweh says: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat because . . . you would surely die" (*mē'ēṣ hadda'at ṭôb wārā' lô tôkal mimmennû kî . . . mût tāmût*, Gen. 2: 17). (2) The occasion to circumvent the prohibition coincides in both cases with a temptation coming from a third party, supernatural in character – and the temptation consists in presenting the forbidden food under an attractive light: it is said to bring life in the case of Adapa, similarity with God

[16] W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs*, Oxford 1969, p. 82: 17 f.

[17] See C.J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscription of Nabonidus," *An. St.* 8 (1958) 35-92; A.L. Oppenheim, *ANET*³ p. 562; Gilgamesh XI 237-43. For Adapa, see already Jacobsen, "Investiture," p. 202 = p. 49. For an interpretation of the Gilgamesh passage as the resolution of the hero's mourning for Enkidu see my article "Gilgamesh in chiave sapienziale: L'umiltà dell'anti-eroe," *Oriens Antiquus* 11 (1972) 18-20.

[18] Roux, "Adapa," p. 26.

[19] Roux, "Adapa," p. 32.

[20] For detailed bibliographical references to early literature see Furlani, "Il mito": he analyzes in detail the elements adduced for comparison and rejects most of them. See also Böhl, "Die Mythen," p. 418. For a recent comparison between Adapa and Old Testament material see W. Herrmann, "Das Todesgeschick als Problem in Altisrael," *MIOF* 16 (1970) 18 f.

in the case of Adam and Eve.[21] (3) Both traditions present the culprit as summoned directly by god into his presence. Admittedly, the sequence of events and the nature of the details is different. Adapa is summoned by an angry Anu who rises from his throne at the news that the wing of the South wind is broken; and it is man, in this tradition, who journeys to heaven to meet the supreme god: "(Anu) made him take the road to heaven, and to heaven Adapa went up" (*[ḫarr]ān [š]amē ušeṣbissu-ma [a]na šamē il[ī]*, 37). In heaven, as we have seen, there follows a proper questioning session, during which Adapa remains obedient to Ea. Adam, on the other hand, is approached in the garden by God, and is punished because of his disobedience. But for all these differences, there remains the undeniable similarity of the direct confrontation between god and man, in a way not otherwise common in the traditions of Mesopotamia. (4) Finally, and within the context of this confrontation, a specific similarity which remains to be stressed is the presumed ignorance of the events on the part of god. Anu asks: "Why hasn't the south wind been blowing? ," and then to Adapa: "Why did you break the wing of the South wind? "; and Yahweh asks: "Where are you? ," and "Did you taste from the tree from which I have forbidden you to eat? " The topos of the god asking questions serves to put in bolder relief the event: the fact of posing a question is a dramatic device used to stress the unexpectedness of the circumstances and the attending surprise.

The main difference between Adapa and Adam is that the former remains obedient, whereas the latter betrays his trust. In this respect, Adapa calls to mind other Biblical figures. But before looking in that direction, let us compare Adapa with other figures of the Mesopotamian tradition. I have already referred to similarities between Adapa and the heroes of the flood stories. It is pertinent to stress, at this point, two important traits of these Mesopotamian "men of faith." Firstly, the texts stress the nature of events as a test of faith, particularly because the divine command is not accompanied by much explanation. Typical is the order given by Ea to Ut-napištim – to destroy his house, abandon possessions, give up material goods (*Uqur bīta . . . muššir mešrē . . . makkūra zīr*, Gilgamesh XI 24-26), and all this without any good reason, with only an enigmatic reference to the flood, shrouded in word play. Secondly, the reaction on the part of man is not that of an easy and automatic acceptance, as if the act of faith were effortless. Especially on one occasion, in Atram-hasīs, the psychological difficulties of the human protagonist are described by our author: while a farewell party is going on with the neighbors unaware of the impending disaster, Atram-ḫasīs is restless and distressed – "he was coming and going, without sitting down at the tables, broken in his heart, sick to his stomach" (*irrub u uṣṣī, ul uššab ul ikammis, ḫepī-ma libbašu, imā' martam*, Lambert and Millard, Atra-ḫasīs, p. 92, 45-47).

If we look now at the Biblical world, it comes natural to think of Noah, once the figures of Utnapishtim and Atram-ḫasīs are brought into play. But in our present context, the difference rather than the similarity needs stressing: while the unhesitating obedience of the Mesopotamian flood hero was offered in almost complete darkness, Noah's obedience, though equally unhesitating, was buttressed nevertheless by an advance detailed description of the impending flood and a reasoned statement about its causes (Genesis 6: 13. 17; 7: 4). We must then look elsewhere for a truer parallel – truer in terms of the nature of the human response if not in terms of the course of events: Adapa and Ut-napištim/Atram-ḫasīs may then be compared with Abraham. Abraham too was called, for no stated reason, to abandon his land and his home (Genesis 12: 1-3); his response was given in the darkness and was based on faith toward the divine source of the command – and thus made him the prototype of the man of faith for a long and lasting religious tradition. In this tradition, reaching from the ancient Israelites down to Christianity, Abraham, if truly the prototype, is by no means the only champion of faith; it will be sufficient to refer here to chapter eleven of the epistle to the Hebrews, an eloquent document, in the late strands of the tradition, of the awareness for the value of faith as evidenced through the centuries by an ever larger number of witnesses.

[21] For an interesting attempt to connect the Biblical story of the Fall of man with other Near Eastern, specifically Canaanite, elements, see J.A. Soggin, "La caduta dell'uomo nel terzo capitolo della Genesi," *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 33 (1963) 227-56.

In Mesopotamia, on the other hand, the notion of faith remained much less pervasive than in the Biblical tradition. In terms of personifications and events ("mythology"), it does not seem to surface elsewhere outside of Adapa and the flood stories. In terms of ideological systematization, it does not seem to have been singled out as a fundamental category of religious behavior, to judge from such catalogs as Šurpu II-IV[22] or the so-called Canon of Moral Attitudes.[23] In terms of historical individuals bearing concrete witness to a specific god's message even at the risk of personal danger (of which the Israelite prophets will be the prototype) we have only sporadic examples[24]. Finally, in terms of popular spirituality we have little to go by, our evidence being limited to such sources as personal names, especially those which express trust and confidence toward a specific god, e. g. *Ana-Marduk-Taklāku* "I trust in Marduk."[25] All in all, then, faith as personal reliance and commitment to an individual god does not seem to be in the foreground in Mesopotamia – which will come as no surprise. Rather, it is the exceptions which must not go unnoticed or be underestimated. They reflect basic dimensions of a religious sensitivity which, though receiving its classical expression in the Biblical tradition, was not wholly alien from the surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures.

[Some of the conclusions put forth in this article have also been reached independently by P. Xella in his study "L'inganno' di Ea nel mito di Adapa," forthcoming in *Oriens Antiquus.*]

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[22] Though the value of reciprocal faith and trust among humans is recognized, see III 34: *māmīt ana ibri tamī u dākīšu* "the evil oath portent of swearing (trust) to a friend and then killing him."

[23] See the writer's "Le Beatitudini sullo sfondo della sapienza Mesopotamica," *Bibbia e Oriente* 14 (1972). 241-64.

[24] For the so-called prophetism of Mari see especially *ARMT* XIII 112:6'.16'-18' (recent translation by W.L. Moran in *ANET*[3], p. 624), where a boy charged with revealing a divine message, at first refuses to do so, and then, after he does , falls ill, presumably indicating with his reaction a basic psychological difficulty in communicating a difficult divine revelation. For a similar reaction of fear when facing the dangers of prophetic vocation see my forthcoming article "Of a Prophetic Topos in Assyria and ancient Israel."

[25] See J.J. Stamm, *Die Akkadische Namengebung, MVÄG* 44, Leipzig 1939, pp. 194-201. Some of the names, instead of referring to a god by name, use simply the term *ilum*, e.g. *Iliš-tikal* "Trust-in-god!" This could refer not so much to god in general, as to the personal god whose name was perhaps known only to the worshipper (cf. e. g. Šurpu II 75; Namburbi, 12: Rev. 7, in R. Caplice's edition, *Or.* NS 36, 1967, p. 4 and 6); the notion of personal god was more likely to allow the development of an attitude of personal devotion and commitment to a divine being on the part of man. On the notion of personal god in general see especially Jacobsen, *Image of Tammuz*, s. v. in the index, p. 503.