



The Confusion of Languages

The sequence of events as presented in the Book of Genesis places the catastrophe of Babel next after the Deluge.

And the whole land was of one language and of one speech. . . . And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven. . . . And the Lord said, behold, the people is one, and they have all one language. . . . Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.⁽¹⁾

The rabbinical sources explain that the purpose of the Tower was to secure a shelter for the city of Babel in case the Deluge should occur another time:

The men who were before us God has destroyed with a deluge; if he shall again think fit to be wroth with us, and seek to destroy us even with a deluge, we shall all perish to a man. But come, let us prepare bricks and burn them with fire, that they may withstand the waters and building them together with asphalt, let us make a high tower the top of which shall reach to heaven, in order that being delivered from the deluge we may find safety in the tower.⁽²⁾

This purpose of the builders is found also in an account of this catastrophe which the aborigines of Central America transmitted from generation to generation. Ixtlilxochitl, after narrating the story of the Deluge which brought to a close the first world age, Atonatiuh, and destroyed most of mankind, described the catastrophe which ended the second age or Ehecatonatiuh—"the sun of wind."

And as men were thereafter multiplying they constructed a very high and strong *Zacualli*, which means "a very high tower" in order to protect themselves when again the second world should be destroyed. At the crucial moment their languages were changed, and as they did not understand one another, they went into different parts of the world.⁽³⁾

The same author also gives another version of the same catastrophe:

When 1715 years had passed since the Deluge [men] were destroyed by a violent hurricane (Uraacan) which carried off trees, mountains, houses and people, and great buildings, although many men and women escaped, especially those that were able to take refuge in caves and places where this great hurricane could not reach.⁽⁴⁾

Similarly wrote Gomara (ca. 1510-1560): "The wind which occurred at that time was so great and of such force that it overthrew all buildings and trees, and even broke mountains apart."⁽⁵⁾

Many of the sources which recount the destruction of the Tower of Babel maintain, in close accord with the Mexican account, that the catastrophe was caused by a violent wind. Thus the Sibyl is said to have prophesied:

When are fulfilled the threats of the great God With which he threatened men, when formerly in the Assyrian land they built a tower, And all were of one speech, and wished to rise Even till they climbed unto the starry heaven, Then the Immortal raised a mighty wind And laid upon them strong necessity; For when the wind threw down the mighty tower, Then rose among mankind fierce strife and hate. One speech was changed into many dialects, And earth was filled with divers tribes and kings. [\(6\)](#)

In the *Book of Jubilees* it is said that “the Lord sent a mighty wind against the tower and overthrew it upon the earth.” [\(7\)](#)

The Babylonian account, as transmitted by Abydenus, tells that once men “built a high tower where now is Babylon, and when it was already close to heaven, the gods sent winds and ruined the entire scheme. . . . and men, having till then been all of the same speech, received [now] from the gods many languages.” [\(8\)](#)

Other accounts give the impression that a strong electrical discharge—possibly from an overcharged ionosphere—found a contact body in the high structure. According to a tradition known to the twelfth century traveler Benjamin of Tudela, “fire from heaven fell in the midst of the tower and broke it asunder.” [\(9\)](#) In the Tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian *Talmud* it is said: “A third of the tower was burnt, a third sank [into the earth] and a third is still standing.” [\(10\)](#)

The Tower of Babel story was found in the most remote parts of the world prior to the arrival of missionaries in those places, thus before the Biblical account became known to the aborigines.

For instance, on the island of Hao, part of the Puamotu (or Tuamotu) islands in Polynesia, the people used to tell that after a great flood the sons of Rata, who survived, made an attempt to erect a building by which they could reach the sky and see the creator god Vatea (or Atea). “But the god in anger chased the builders away, broke down the building, and changed their language, so that they spoke divers tongues.” [\(11\)](#)

The question of Biblical influence was discussed by the folklorist: “They [the natives of Hao] declared that this tradition existed already with their ancestors, before the arrival of the Europeans. I leave to them the responsibility for this declaration. All I can certify is that this tradition contains many ancient words which today are no longer understood by the natives.” [\(12\)](#)

Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Quiche Mayas, narrates that the language of all the families that were gathered at Tulan was confused and none could understand the speech of the others. [\(13\)](#)

The Kaska (Indian) story makes the result into the cause. The Indians narrate that “a great darkness came on, and high winds which drove the vessels hither and thither. The people became separated. Some were driven away. . . . Long afterwards, when in their wanderings they met people from another place, they spoke different languages, and could not understand one another.” [\(14\)](#)

With this exception—the Kaska story may refer to any great upheaval and is actually an effect of large-scale migrations—the traditions of the peoples make the catastrophe the immediate cause of the confusion of languages and the dispersion as well.

While the account in Genesis, and that given by Abydenos and various other sources connect the story with a certain place in Mesopotamia, other traditions localize it in many different countries.⁽¹⁵⁾ In each case the entire population of the world is said to have been affected. If the nature of the catastrophe was cosmic, the same occurrence could have taken place in different countries. In this case the existence of similar traditions in many corners of the globe is of no avail for tracing the migration of ancient tribes. The Arabic tradition makes South Arabia the scene of the upheaval, followed by confusion of languages and migrations.⁽¹⁶⁾ Similar experiences could have been brought about by one and the same cause in many places.

It appears that after the Flood the plain of Mesopotamia became one of the few cultural centers of the world. Another flood would have caused the utter destruction of the human race, and this was feared because the memory of the Flood a few centuries earlier was very vivid. Observations of the movements of the heavenly bodies may have provided a warning of a new catastrophe and large structures were built for refuge. But when the event came, the structures were overwhelmed and destroyed by hurricanes and powerful electrical discharges.

In the rabbinical concept of the seven earths, molded one out of another in successive catastrophes, the generation which built the Tower of Babel inhabited the fourth earth; but it goes on to the fifth earth where the men become oblivious of their origin and home:⁽¹⁷⁾ those who built the Tower of Babel are told to forget their language. This generation is called “the people who lost their memory.” The earth which they inhabited was “the fifth earth, that of oblivion (Neshiah)⁽¹⁸⁾

In the ancient Mexican traditions it is told that those who survived the catastrophe of the “sun of wind” lost “their reason and speech.”⁽¹⁹⁾

The characteristic of this catastrophe was its influence upon the mental, or mnemonic, capacity of the peoples. The description of it, as told by many tribes and peoples, if it contains authentic features, arouses the surmise that the earth underwent an electromagnetic disturbance, and that the human race experienced something that in modern terms seems like a consequence of a deep electrical shock.

The application of electrical current to the head of a human being often results in a partial loss of memory; also a loss of speech may be induced by the application of electrodes to specific areas of the brain.⁽²⁰⁾

References

1. Genesis XI. 1-9.
2. Quoted in Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography* (Hakluyt Society: London, 1897). Cf. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, I. 4. 2. and sources in L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. V, pp. 199-200. [Some of the sources assert that the builders of the Tower feared a world conflagration. Cf. S. Bochart, *Geographia Sacra*, Lib. I, cap. xiv (Lugduni Batavorum, 1707): “. . . *Video quosquam asserere, illos futuri incendii metu de asylo sibi prospexisse, memores scilicet ‘affore tempus quo mare, quo tellus, correptaque regia coeli ardeat, et mundi moles operosa laboret.’*”].
3. Don Fernando de Alvara Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Historicas* (Mexico, 1891), Vol. I, p. 12.
4. *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.* [Similarly, the sacred writings of the Burmese relate that “when the world is destroyed by wind . . . the wind begins to

blow and gradually increases. At first it only raises sand and small stones; but at length it whirls about immense rocks, and the summits of mountains." F. Buchanan, "On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas," *Asiatick Researches* VII (1799), p. 244.]

5. F. L. de Gomara, *Conquista de Mexico* (Mexico, 1870), vol. II, p. 261. [The order of the "sun ages" of the ancient Mexicans is given differently by different authors: but the most reliable of the sources—the Vatican Codex, Ixtlilxochitl, and Veytia—all agree that Ehecatonatiuh, or "the sun of wind" was the second age, following after the "sun of water" or Atonatiuh.]
6. Quoted by Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus* II. xxxi, transl. by M. Dods in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, 1962); Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* I. 109-121; Bochart, *Geographia Sacra* I. 13; *The Sibylline Oracles* III. 97-107 in R. Charles ed., *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), Vol. I, pp. 380f.
7. *The Book of Jubilees* 10.26 in Charles ed., *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Cf. also Midrash Rabba to Genesis, and sources in Ginzberg, *Legends* III. 35.
8. Abydenus, quoted by Cyril, *Adversus Julianum* Bk. I, and by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX, 14.
9. Quoted in Bochart, *Geographia Sacra* I. 13. Cf. M. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (London, 1907).
10. Tractate Sanhedrin XI (fol. 109A) of Seder Nezikin, transl. by H. Freedman, ed by I. Epstein (London, 1935), p. 748. [The tradition that fire from heaven destroyed the tower is also a feature of some of the Meso-American accounts, e.g., the legend recorded by Pedro de los Rios concerning the foundation of the pyramid of Cholula in Mexico. After the waters of the Deluge had receded, one of the survivors came to Cholula, where he began to build a large structure. "It was his purpose to raise the mighty edifice to the clouds, but the gods, offended at his presumption, hurled the fire of heaven down on the pyramid, many of the workmen perished, and the building remained unfinished." (J. G. Frazer, *Folk Lore in the Old Testament* Vol. I [London, 1918]. Frazer adds that "It is said that at the time of the Spanish conquest the inhabitants of Cholula preserved with great veneration a large aerolite, which according to them was the very thunderbolt that fell on the pyramid and set it on fire." Cf. E. B. Tylor, *Anahuac* p. 277. Another Mexican tradition, recorded by Diego Duran in 1579 (*Historia de las Indias de Nueva Espana y las Islas de Tierra Firme* I [Mexico, 1867], pp. 6ff.) tells of giants who built a tower that almost reached the heavens, when it was destroyed by a thunderbolt.]
11. R. W. Williamson, *Religious and Cosmic Beliefs of Central Polynesia* (Cambridge, 1933), vol. I, p. 94.
12. A.-C. Eugene Caillot, *Mythes, legendes et traditions des Polynesiens* (Paris, 1914), p. 16, n. 1. The tradition was among those collected by Caillot in 1912 or 1913; his publication contains the story in the original Polynesian and in a French translation.
13. Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Histoire des nations civilises du Mexique* (1857-59), vol. I, p. 72. [Cf. also the Andean tradition recorded by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in his *Historia de los Incas*, ch. 7. In common with other accounts, it places the confusion of languages after the Deluge.]

14. "Kaska Tales," collected by James A. Teit, *Journal of American Folklore*, no. 30 (1917), p. 442.
15. Many different traditions were collected by James G. Frazer in *Folklore in the Old Testament*, (London, 1918), Vol. I, ch. V. Cf. H. H. Bankroft, *The Native Races of the Pacific States*, Vol. V.
16. D. Reiske, *De Arabum Epocha Vetustissima, Sail Ol Arem, etc.* (Leipzig, 1748). [The question of whether the Greeks transmitted an account of the same events was debated by several writers in antiquity, including Philo of Alexandria (*De Confusione Linguarum*), Cyril of Alexandria (*Contra Julianum*, Bk. IV) and Origen (*Contra Celsum* IV. 21). These writers saw a link between the story of the revolt of the giants—the sons of Aloeus who piled Ossa upon Olympus and Pelion atop Ossa in a vain effort to reach the lofty dwelling of Zeus and make war on the gods—and the account of the construction of the tower of Babel in Genesis XI. 3-8. The earliest allusion to these events is in Homer's *Odyssey* (XI. 315-316); Homer ascribes the destruction of the giants to Apollo. Pliny *N. H.* II. 8. 30) and Macrobius (*Saturn.* I. 19. 7) identified Apollo with the planet Mercury. Apuleius wrote (*De Mundo*, 336) that Mercury and Apollo were alternate names for "Stilbon," the planet Mercury.

Hesiod described the battle with the giants as an immense catastrophe involving the earth and heaven alike.

The boundless sea rang terribly around, and the earth crashed loudly: wide heaven was shaken and groaned, and high Olympus reeled from its foundations under the charge of the undying gods, and a heavy quaking reached Tartarus. . . . the cry of both armies as they shouted reached to starry heaven.

Then Zeus no longer held back his might; but straight his heart was filled with fury and he showed forth all his strength. From heaven and from Olympus he came forthwith, hurling his lightning: the bolts flew thick and fast from his strong hand, together with thunder and lightning, whirling and awesome flame. The life-giving earth crashed around in burning, and the vast wood cracked loud with fire all about. All the land seethed, and Ocean's streams and the unfruitful sea. The hot vapour lapped round the earthborn Titans: flame unspeakable rose to the bright upper air: the flashing glare of the thunder shone and lightning blinded their eyes, for all that they were strong.

It seemed as if Earth and wide Heaven above came together; for such a mighty crash would have arisen if the Earth were being hurled to ruin and Heaven from on high were hurling her down.

. . . Also the winds brought rumbling earthquake and duststorm, thunder and lightning, and the lurid thunderbolt, which are the shafts of great Zeus.

Seneca also referred to the same events in mentioning Jupiter's thunderbolts "by which the threefold mass of mountains fell" and a tradition held that this was the first occasion on which Jupiter used his bolts (Ovid, *Fasti* III. 438). The pagans disputed with the Jews and Christians whether Moses took the story from Homer or Homer from Moses, but the common origin of the two accounts was generally conceded. One early writer, Eupolemus, drew on both

sources in asserting that “the city of Babylon had been founded by those who saved themselves from the deluge: they were giants, and they built the famous tower.” (Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.*) From the viewpoint of sequential chronology, the link is plausible. The giants’ revolt is said to have occurred not long after Zeus had taken over from Kronos the dominion of the sky, and it marks the real beginning of Jupiter’s dominion. Cf. Bochart, *Geographia Sacra*, I. 13.].

17. This is told in allegorical form in the tale of the wanderings of Adam. The myth of Man (Adam) traveling through all the seven earths is a transparent allegory of the physical and human history of the earth. See *Sefer Raziel*; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends* I. 90ff., V. 117f.
18. *Midrash Rabba* to Genesis, Exodus; Ginzberg, *Legends* I. 114; *Zohar Hadesh Bereshit* 8a-8b, *Zohar Ruth* 97b, and other sources in Ginzberg, *Legends*, V. 143. [In *Tractate Sanhedrin* 109a it is said that the place where the Tower once stood retains the peculiar quality of inducing a total loss of memory in anyone who passes it.]
19. H. H. Bankroft, *The Native Races* (San Francisco, 1882), vol. III, p. 64.
20. The electro-convulsive therapy used in psychiatry for the treatment of certain mental cases is administered by passing current through electrodes on the forehead. Conducted through the brain, the electric discharge causes a period of confusion and a subsequent complete, though temporary, loss of memory of the events immediately preceding the discharge. A number of patients complain also of consequent disturbances of longer duration, and some of them suffer a patchy, retrograde amnesia. See the article by Siskind in *Archive of Neurological Psychiatry* (Chicago, 1941), p. 215, 223.





Mercury

It can be assumed with a fair amount of probability that the planet that caused the disturbances described above was the planet Mercury, the Greek Hermes, the Babylonian Nebo.

To each of the planets is ascribed a world age, and the ages of the other planets—Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Venus, and Mars—are well discernible; the dominion of Mercury must be looked for in one of the world ages, and one of the world cataclysms was apparently ascribed to this lesser planet.⁽¹⁾ Mercury was a feared god long before Mars (Nergal) became one. As the name of Mount Sinai refers to Sin, the Moon, so the name of Mount Nebo in Moab where Moses died⁽²⁾ was called already in that early time by the name of the planet Mercury. Later in the seventh and sixth centuries before the present era, this god was much venerated, especially by the Chaldeans and other peoples of Mesopotamia, as the names of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar prove.⁽³⁾ In earlier times Mercury was known to the Sumerians as Enki.⁽⁴⁾

Equally pronounced was the position of Thoth, the planet Mercury of the Egyptian pantheon, the theophoric part of the name Thutmose.⁽⁵⁾ For the northern peoples, Mercury was Odin.⁽⁶⁾

It is characteristic that in many astronomical texts Mercury, the Greek Hermes, the Babylonian Nebo, the Egyptian Thoth, is portrayed as the planet-god which had in his dominion the physiological capacity of memory in man,⁽⁷⁾ as well as that of speech. According to Augustine, “speech is Mercury.”⁽⁸⁾

Direct information that confirms our assumption is provided by Hyginus. Hyginus wrote that for many centuries men “lived without town or laws, speaking one tongue under the rule of Jove. But after Mercury explained the languages of men (whence he is called *hermeneutes*, ‘interpreter,’ for Mercury in Greek is called Hermes; he, too, divided the nations) then discord arose among mortals. . . .”⁽⁹⁾

The Romans as well as the Greeks pictured Mercury with wings, either on his headgear or at his ankles,⁽¹⁰⁾ and with an emblem, the caduceus, a staff with two snakes winding. The double serpent (caduceus), the emblem of Mercury, is found in ornaments of all peoples of antiquity; a special treatise could be written about this subject; I found the caduceus all around the world.⁽¹¹⁾ Mercury, or Hermes of the Greeks, was a messenger of the gods that speeded on his errand, sent by Jupiter.⁽¹²⁾

Among the satellites that presently orbit each of the giant planets are bodies comparable in size to Mercury, or even larger.⁽¹³⁾ Abraham Rockenbach, whose *De Cometis Tractatus Novus Methodicus* we had occasion to quote when investigating the causes of the Deluge, included in his treatise also the following entry:

In the year of the world one thousand nine hundred and forty-four, two hundred and eighty-eight years after the Deluge, a comet was seen in Egypt of the nature of Saturn, in the vicinity of Cairo, in the constellation of Capricorn, and within the

space of sixty-five days it traversed three signs in the sky. Confusions of languages and dispersals of peoples followed. On this the text of the eleventh chapter of Genesis speaks in more detail. [\(14\)](#)

From the annals of modern astronomy we know of cases when a comet traveling on an elongated orbit was “caught” by the planet Jupiter, by which is meant the change of the cometary orbit to one of a short period, with the sun in the focus of its orbit.

It is possible to reconstruct the planetary disturbances of that age with some approximation. In my understanding Mercury was once a satellite of Jupiter, or possibly of Saturn. In the course of the events which followed Saturn’s interaction with Jupiter and its subsequent disruption, Mercury was pushed from its orbit and was directed to the sun by Jupiter. It could, however, have been a comet and the entwined snakes of the caduceus may memorialize the appearance it had when seen by the inhabitants of the Earth. At some point a contact occurred between the magnetospheres of Mercury and the Earth, described in the traditions of various nations. [\(15\)](#)

That the Earth was once a satellite of a giant planet is nothing more than a surmise; we dealt with it only as with a hypothetical construction, requiring further elucidation. But with a greater show of support derived from the mythological and folkloristic sources we have tried to demonstrate on the case of Mercury that once it had been a satellite of one of the giant planets and was “directed” by Jupiter closer to the sun. [\(16\)](#)

The claim therefore is that Mercury has traveled on its present orbit for only some five or six thousand years. This view conflicts with both the nebular and the tidal theories of the origin of the planetary family, and with the assumption that the planets have occupied the same orbits for billions of years.

References

1. [Among the reasons which suggest that Mercury was the planet which caused the catastrophe of the confusion of languages is the fact that the age of Mercury follows that of Saturn. In the Hindu conception of the world ages, Satya yuga, the Saturnian age, was brought to a close by a general flood. Cf. Sir William Jones, “On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India,” *Asiatick Researches* I (1799), p. 234: “. . . The Satya, or (if we may venture to call it) the Saturnian age was, in truth, the age of the *general* flood” (emphasis in text). Mercury appeared soon after the beginning of the next age, the Treta yuga; and for at least a part of this age men lived under the aegis of Mercury. In Hindu astronomy the usual name for the planet Mercury was Budha. In the *Bhagavatamrita* it is said that “Budha [Mercury] became visible the 1002nd year of the Cali yug.” According to John Bentley, “the 1002nd year of the Cali yug [astronomical era] corresponds . . . with “the 179th year of the Treta yug of the poets.” “Remarks on the Principal Aeras and Dates of the Ancient Hindus,” *Asiatick Researches* V (1799), pp. 320f. The *Bhagavatamrita* describes in mythical language the first appearance of Mercury. See W. Jones, “On the Chronology of the Hindus,” *Asiatick Researches* II (1799), p. 122. Jones also placed “the ancient Budha, or Mercury . . . about the beginning of the Treta yug.” In Hindu lore Budha, or Mercury, is said to have married Ila, the daughter of Satyavrata, the Manu of the Satya yuga, in whose days the Deluge occurred. This is but a way of saying that the time of Mercury’s prominence was shortly after the Deluge, the age of Saturn, the Satya yuga. *The Matsya Puranam* ed. and transl. by Jamna das Akhtar (Delhi, 1972), ch. xi.

Among the descriptive epithets applied to Mercury in India, were *budha*—"mind, spirit, intelligence," *sarvagna*—"all-knowing," *shadhabhigna*—"possessor of the six sciences," *advayavadi*—"eloquent, unequalled in speech." See Fr. Paulinus, *Systema Brahmanicum* (Rome, 1791), pp. 156f. The presence of the god could induce forgetfulness. (*The Matsyapuram* XI. 61).].

2. Deuteronomy 34: 1-5; cf. Jastrow, *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens*, p. 124, n. 3.
3. [Nebo was regarded as the son of Marduk, or Jupiter. His chief cult center in Babylonia was Borsippa, whose ziggurat, or stepped pyramid, was consecrated to Nebo. In the Talmud (Sanhedrin XI. 109a) the ruins of this structure were considered to be the remains of the Tower of Babel. (Cf. Obermeyer, pp. 314, 327, 346). It was of these ruins that R. Yochanan is reported to have said "a third of the tower was burnt, a third sunk [into the earth], and a third is still standing." The Talmud next quotes Rab as having said "The atmosphere of the tower causes forgetfulness."

Nebo was also thought of as the herald of the gods, and as presiding over all matters pertaining to the intellect. Cf. Jastrow, *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens*, Vol. I, pp. 121, 123, 238; Cf. the prayer of Assurbanipal: "For Nebo the perfect son, regulator of all things in heaven and earth, him that holds the tablet of wisdom, carrier of the stylus of fate. . . ." S. Langdon, *Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms* (Paris, 1909), p. 129.].

4. ["The Sumerians believed that there was a time when all mankind spoke one and the same language, and that it was Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom, who confounded their speech"—so concluded S. N. Kramer after publishing his translation of a Sumerian epic fragment. See S. N. Kramer, "The 'Bable of Tongues' : A Sumerian Version," *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, pp. 108-111. The text of the tablet is translated by Kramer as follows:

The whole universe, the people in unison To Enlil in one tongue ___ Enki ___ the leader of the gods, Endowed with wisdom ___ Changed the speech in their mouths (brought) contention into it, Into the speech of man that (until then) had been one.

Cf. K. Seybold, "Der Turmbau zu Babel," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (197x), pp. 453-479; J. van Dijk, "La 'Confusion des langues' . Note sur le lexique et sur la morphologie d'Enmerkar, 147-155," *Orientalia* 39 (1970), pp. 302-310; B. Alster, "An Aspect of 'Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta' ," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 67 (1973), pp. 101-109.

The Sumerian Enki was the same as the Babylonian Ea; See for instance M. Jastrow, *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens* (Giessen, 1905), Vol. I, p. 62. The name Ea was written with the ideogram EN.KI. Students of Babylonian astronomy are well aware that "by 'Star of the god Ea' Mercury is meant." *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 667, note 2.].

5. Cf. P. Boylan, *Thoth the Hermes of Egypt* (Oxford, 1922). [Diodorus wrote (I. 17. 3) that when Isis took over the kingdom from Osiris, Hermes (i.e., Thoth) became her chief counsellor. This means that the planet Mercury was prominent in the period after Jupiter replaced Saturn as the dominant planet. Diodorus also wrote that it was by the Egyptian Hermes "that the common language of mankind was first further articulated" (I. 16. 1).

An Egyptian hymn calls Thoth the deity that “made different the tongue of one country from another.” (J. Cerny, “Thoth as Creator of Languages,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 34 (1[48], pp. 121-122.) Another text tells that this god “distinguished (or separated) the tongue of country from country.” (*Ibid.*, p. 121). Yet another recounts that he “distinguished the tongue of every foreign land.” (*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*) Cerny comments that the words “made different” or “distinguished” or “separated” are “past participles alluding probably to some lost myth or legend according to which Thoth differentiated the languages of the various countries. These epithets might even be cited as evidence of an Egyptian parallel to the Hebrew fable of Yahwe and the Tower of Babel.” Cf. J. G. Griffith, *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride*, pp. 263f. In Egyptian texts Thoth was called “lord of divine words” and “mighty in speech” ; according to E. A. W. Budge, “from one aspect he is speech itself . . . Thoth could teach a man not only words of power, but also the manner in which to utter them. . . . The words, however . . . must be learned from Thoth.” Thoth was also known as “scribe of the gods” and “lord of books.” (*The Gods of the Egyptians* [London, 1904], vol. I, p. 401; cf. P. Boylan, *Thoth the Hermes of Egypt* [Oxford, 1922] and B. von Turayeff, “Zwei Hymnen an Thoth,” *Zeitschrift fuer Aegyptische Sprache* 33 [1895], pp. 120-125).

In the dialogue *Phaedrus* (sect. 274-275), Plato presents a story about the invention of letters by Thoth, and explores some of the implications of this new skill. It “will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves.” (transl. by B. Jowett)].

6. [See Tacitus, *Germania* IX, transl. by H. Mattingly (1948): “Above all they worship Mercury, and count it no sin to win his favor on certain days by human sacrifices.” Odin was the head of the Nordic pantheon. Matthew of Westminster (Flores ed., 1601, p. 82) transmits a speech by Saxon envoys to Britain ca. 450 A.D.: “*Deos patrios, scilicet Saturnum, Jovem atque ceteros, qui mundum gubernant, colimus, maxime autem Mercurium, quem lingua nostra Voden apellamus.*”—“We worship the gods of our fathers, that is, Jupiter, Saturn, and the rest of those that rule the world, but most of all [we worship] Mercury, whom in our language we call Voden.”

Of Odin it was said: “He spoke so well and so smoothly that all who heard him believed all he said was true.”—*Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, transl. by Lee M. Hollander (Austin, 1964), pp. 10-11. He was associated with Hugin or “thought” and Munin or “memory.”

One of the myths about Odin connects him with the multiplicity of languages. In the *Gylfaginning*, ch. XIX, it is said that the reason why Odin is known by many different names is “the fact that there are in the world so many different languages.”].

7. [*Hermes*. “The planet Mercury [is] the deity which presides over the rational energy,” wrote the neo-Platonist philosopher Porphyry (*On the Wanderings of Ulysses*, transl. by Th. Taylor [London. 1823], p. 259) and Proclus, the last great representative of that school, elaborated in his description of Mercury’s powers: “(Mercury) unfolds into light intellectual gifts, fills all things with divine reasons, elevates souls to intellect, wakens them as from a profound sleep. . . .” (*In Euclidi Elementa* lib. I, par. 14; cf. *idem, In Platonis Rem Publicam*, ed. Nauck, I. 255, II. 221). Proclus also described Hermes as “responsible for distinguishing and interpreting things,

recalling to memory the sources of the intellect” (*In Platonis Rem Publicam* II. 224).

Nebo. See above, n. 3

Thoth. An Egyptian hymn assigns to Thoth control over man’s mnemonic powers, invoking him as the deity “that recalls all what had been forgotten.” (R. Hari, *Horemheb et le Reine Moutnedjemet* [Geneva, 1965]).]

8. *The City of God* VII. 14. 1. [Servius called Mercury “et orationis deus et interpret deorum” (*In Vergili Aeneidem* IV. 239). Arnobius (*Adversus Gentes* III. 32) argued that Mercury is simply speech and words exchanged in conversation. Cf. Hippolytus, *Refutatio* V. 2; Clement of Alexandria, *Homilia* VI. xv; Macrobius wrote in his *Saturnalia*: “scimus autem Mercurium vocis et sermonis potentem.” Proclus, (*Commentaire sur le Timee*, transl. by Festugiere, Vol. V, p. 237) asserted that “la faculte de langage [correspond a] Hermes. . . .” Cf. F. Buffiere, *Les Mythes d’Homere et la Pensée grecque* (Paris, 1956), pp. 289ff. A scholium to Aristophanes’ *Plutus*, Act. IV, scene I, and a scholium to Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica* 1. 517 provide further details about Mercury’s association with language.]
9. Hyginus, *Fabulae*, no. 143: “Phoroneus,” transl. by M. Grant in *The Myths of Hyginus* (University of Kansas Publications: Lawrence, 1960). Here Mercury is made directly responsible for the confusion of languages. “The meaning is clearly that Hermes invented one language for one people, another for another. The whole account reminds one of the Biblical Tower of Babel.” *ibid.*, p. 118.
10. According to Servius (*In Vergili Aeneidem Commentarii* IV. 239) “Mercurius ideo dicitur habere pennas, quia citius ab omnibus planetis in ortum suum recurrit unde et velox et errans inducitur, ut (*Georgica* I. 337) ‘quos ignis caeli Cyllenius erret in orbes.’”
11. The caduceus was an emblem of the Babylonian deity Ningishzida, and an astronomical tablet from Boghazkoi identifies Ningishzida with Nebo-Mercury (Weidner, *Handbuch der babylonischen Astronomie*, p. 61). Cf. H. Th. Bossert, *Altsyrien* (Tuebingen, 1951), p. 139, figs. 442 & 445. H. Schliemann found the caduceus at Mycenae. Ancient Mexican codices portray the worship of entwined snakes. See Lord Kingsborough, *The Antiquities of Mexico* (London, 1830), Vol. II, p. 4. Cf. H. B. Alexander, *Latin American Mythology* (*Mythology of All Races*, Vol. XI (1920), p. 72; cf. also Franz Boas, *Kwakiutl Culture as Reflected in Mythology*, (New York, 1935), p. 137.
12. Homer, *The Odyssey* VI; Vergil, *The Aeneid* IV. 239.
13. Jupiter’s satellite Ganymede is larger than Mercury, and Saturn’s biggest moon, Titan, is almost as large.
14. *De Cometis Tractatus Novus Methodicus* (Wittenbergae, 1602), pp. 113f.: “Anno mundi millesimo, nongentesimo, quadragesimo quarto. Anno post diluvium, ducentesimo octuagesimo octavo, Cometa in Aegypto naturam Saturni referens, circa Alcairum, in dodecatemorio Capricorni visus est, hicque spatio sexaginta quinque dierum, tria signa in coelo percurrit. Hunc confusiones linguarum, dissipationes gentium in toto terrarum orbe, sunt secutae. De quibus Genes. undecimo capite, prolixius textus dicunt.” Cf. J. Hevelius, *Cometographia* (1668).

15. [In Babylonian sources the destructive acts of Nebo are recorded: "The lofty one, furious . . . the word of him . . . causes the earth beneath to shudder, the word which in his glory he spoke. . . Waters have flooded the wide land." S. Langdon, *Babylonian Liturgies* (Paris, 1913), p. 65.]
16. Cf. R. S. Harrington and T. C. van Flandern, "A Dynamical Investigation of the Conjecture that Mercury is an Escaped Satellite of Venus," *Icarus* 28, (1976), pp. 435-440.

