

Inspector Rex's History Snippet #4

Babylonian New Year 2000BC



Babylonian Akitu

Following the first new moon after the vernal equinox in late March, the Babylonians of ancient Mesopotamia would honor the rebirth of the natural world with a multi-day festival called Akitu. This early New Year's celebration dates back to around 2000 B.C., and is believed to have been deeply intertwined with religion and mythology. During the Akitu, statues of the gods were paraded through the city streets, and rites were enacted to symbolize their victory over the forces of chaos. Through these rituals the Babylonians believed the world was symbolically cleansed and recreated by the gods in preparation for the new year and the return of spring.

One fascinating aspect of the Akitu involved a kind of ritual humiliation endured by the Babylonian king. This peculiar tradition saw the king brought before a statue of the god Marduk, stripped of his royal regalia and forced to swear that he had led the city with honor. A high priest would then slap the monarch and drag him by his ears in the hope of making him cry. If royal tears were shed, it was seen as a sign that Marduk was satisfied and had symbolically extended the king's rule. Some historians have since argued that these political elements suggest the Akitu was used by the monarchy as a tool for reaffirming the king's divine power over his people.

Comment by Inspector Rex: Notice that the date of Easter (rebirth) is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (March 21).