

Ištar in *Enūma eliš*: a Silent Displacement

Gösta Gabriel

Institut für Altorientalistik, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

goesta.gabriel@fu-berlin.de

Received 8 October 2024 | Accepted 14 June 2025 |

Published online 12 September 2025

Abstract

On the surface of the text, Ištar is absent from *Enūma eliš*. She is never mentioned by name, yet there is circumstantial evidence of her presence in three parts of the epic: the enthronement of Kingu, the first elevation of Marduk, and the catasterism of Marduk's bow. The article is a detailed analysis of these three passages using the techniques of hyleme analysis, among others. Based on these observations, it is here argued that the epic seems to undertake a radical redefinition of the goddess by splitting off individual aspects of her personality and then transforming each aspect separately through transformation and recontextualization. In this way, *Enūma eliš* delegitimizes Ištar's legitimizing role in the political concept of the sacred marriage; it devalues her famous descent into the netherworld, and it has Marduk absorb her qualities as a heroine and goddess of war. The assault on Ištar is compounded subsequently by the additional application of *damnatio memoriae*. It is furthermore argued that *Enūma eliš* is part of a pattern in mythical narratives that depict and promote the displacement of female deities from their traditional roles in the ancient Mesopotamian pantheon. The analysis of Ištar's displacement in *Enūma eliš* is, as a side effect, helpful in identifying a new supra-divine status that has a disrupting effect on the hierarchy of the pantheon and is a key factor in Marduk's ascent to and eventual seizing of the throne. The *ontic* levels (divine, supra-divine) of the key players along with their gender, determine their success or failure in the course of the narrative.

Keywords

Ištar – *Enūma eliš* – Marduk – relegation of deities – (de)legitimization strategies

• • •

We must ask more often how things happened in order to find out why they happened.

SCOTT 1986, 1067

• •
•

1 Introduction*

1.1 *An Absent Goddess*

Absence is harder to detect than presence. In *Enūma elīš*, the absence of Enlil is palpable because it is not a total absence. The text *almost* never mentions Enlil by name. When Enlil does appear at the end of the narrative, we realize that the rest of the text is silent about him. An intertextual reading reveals that Enlil has a much stronger presence within the text than a superficial scan would suggest. As Wisnom (2019: 108–19) has shown, the conflict between the first king, Apsû, and the gods at the beginning of the text (1 10–76) is a variant of a myth known from the *Epic of Atra-ḫasis*. There, the human population has grown so large as to disturb the divine king Enlil in his sleep. Intent on restoring peace and quiet, Enlil sets out to destroy humanity but the god Ea intervenes to save humanity. In *Enūma elīš*, it is the noisy gods who deprive the divine king Apsû of sleep, causing him to plot their demise. Again, Ea intervenes, this time killing King Apsû. According to Wisnom (2019: 119), Apsû can be read as a variation of the figure of Enlil, which implies that the end of Apsû's reign symbolizes the end of Enlil's reign. The fate of Enlil, despite the absence of his name from the surface text, demonstrates that an unnamed character is not necessarily absent from the story.

* This article was inspired by Frances Reynolds who in her talk on Kingu at the conference “Gods in Literature” at the University of Oxford on June 21–22, 2023, pointed out that Tiāmtu calls Kingu her husband. I am very thankful for this inspiration.

I could not have reached my conclusions without the invaluable exchange I had with Annette and Christian Zgoll regarding the hidden goddess Ištar and many other topics. I am deeply grateful to them. Furthermore, I owe my gratitude to an anonymous reviewer for their highly helpful remarks. Finally, I would like to thank Tina Jerke for polishing my English. As always, any errors or inconsistencies are my own. This also includes the translations, which are all mine.

When looking for an absent deity in *Enūma elīš*, it is helpful to picture the expectations ancient readers or listeners may have brought to the text. Which deities might they have expected to find in a story about the nature of kingship and the fate of humanity? In the long mythological tradition of ancient Mesopotamia, the one deity most often associated with these themes is Ištar. Once integral to the enthronement of human kings (e.g., Frymer-Kensky 1992: 58–64), her mythical acts of heroism and self-sacrifice are undertaken for the benefit of humankind (e.g., A. Zgoll 2020: 125–7). Considering her significance in the Mesopotamian pantheon, her apparent absence from *Enūma elīš* is both surprising and revealing.

There is another female deity that is treated in the text, but her name is withheld. She is the mother goddess, creatrix of humanity. While Apsû can be interpreted as a version of Enlil from the myth told by the *Epic of Atra-ḫasis*, Tiāmtu also embodies aspects of the mother goddess from the same story (Wisnom 2019: 130; Gabriel 2021a: 141). Not only does the text of *Enūma elīš* withhold the name it also later transforms the benevolent mother into an evil entity seeking to destroy the gods (ibid.; de Boer 2006: 143; Sonik 2009: 86; Gabriel 2014: 117 n. 35).

Hence, one could explain the absence of Ištar from the textual surface of *Enūma elīš* with a possible misogynistic attitude of the text (see, e.g., Frymer-Kensky 1992: 74–6; Assante 1998: 14; Sonik 2009). At the same time, the examples of Apsû-as-Enlil and Tiāmtu-as-mother-goddess are a reminder that an unnamed character is not necessarily absent from the story. In fact, Horowitz (1998: 124) has suggested Marduk's bow may be a representation of Ištar (thus also Gabriel 2014: 304 n. 260). Following this line of thought, three passages in *Enūma elīš* can be decoded as references to Ištar – and, moreover, as three lines of attack against the female deity, her mythical and ritual significance, and her tradition. The first passage is the narration of Kingu's enthronement (I 147–156), the second comes at the end of Marduk's first elevation (IV 19–28), a passage in which he destroys and recreates a star at the request of the gods. In the third, Marduk fashions a bow, his principal weapon against Tiāmtu, which later receives three names from the sky god Anu (VI 84–91).

1.2 *A Novel Legitimizing Challenge*

The rejection of Ištar's significance in *Enūma elīš* is part of a complex interaction by that text with various means of installing a king. The unprecedented challenge to which the epic of *Enūma elīš* is responding calls for nothing less than a narrative to legitimize the installation of a new divine king, Marduk. The procedure for human kings was well-established, but the radical realignment

of the traditional pantheon, certainly with regard to the Mesopotamian central regions,¹ was uncharted territory for the ‘author’² of the epic. As previously discussed in the scholarly literature (e.g., Lambert 1986; Frymer-Kensky 1992: 74f.; Wisnom 2019: 66–157), we assume that the author engaged with and reshaped the mythical tradition to create a new narrative of Marduk’s ascent to the throne and rightful exercise of absolute power.

However, from an emic perspective, legitimation is not only rooted in the myths, but also in rituals. They are essential to install a new king in a legitimate way. A king has to go through various rites in order the ascent to the throne (e.g., A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll 2021: 595). For the scenario of a divine transfer of power, the author of *Enūma elīš* would likely choose from these rituals and/or delegitimize them if they called Marduk’s claim into question.³

Moreover, in the poem, Marduk, the new king, must assert his authority on an already crowded stage, with a large cast of divine characters who must either be swept aside or be absorbed. It is well-known that Marduk replaces Enlil (e.g., Lambert 2013: 149f.), Ninurta (e.g., Lambert 1986; Wisnom 2019: 70–8), Enki/Ea (e.g., Gabriel 2014: 297f.). It is known, furthermore, that Tīāmtu represents the mother goddess (Frymer-Kensky 1992: 17; Wisnom 2019: 130), and that she is removed from the scene before she can create humanity (Gabriel 2021a: 141). It will be shown in this article that in all likelihood Marduk’s rise comes also at the expense of Ištar – and that the attack on her is perhaps the most radical in comparison to the deities already mentioned.

1.3 Structure

Following Horowitz’s suggestion, the present study first examines Marduk’s bow, its presence and function in the epic (2.). It will be shown that the bow is in fact a manifestation of the goddess, with particular reference to her military power. Next, Ištar’s hidden role in Kingu’s enthronement will be scrutinized (3.), followed by a discussion of the scene in which Marduk destroys and

1 In at least one older surviving narrative from the Mesopotamian “periphery,” the Old Babylonian *Song of Bazi* (A. Zgoll 2019), we encounter the installation of a new divine king.

2 I use the term in a more Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1969), understanding ‘author’ as a function of text creation. Whether this was done by a single person or through collaboration of any sort, we cannot say. We know almost nothing about the practicalities of literary writing in ancient Mesopotamia. From what we can see, we can deduce that many of these texts were compiled using tradition material to a large extent. This is especially true of *Enūma elīš*.

3 Groneberg (1997a: 291) argues that literary texts often follow the patterns of ritual acts without explicitly stating the fact, a phenomenon she has described as “implizites Ritual.” If we are able to identify a ritual as *Vorlage*, it is possible to reconstruct parts of it from a literary source.

recreates a star (4.). In both sections, hyleme analysis will allow us to undertake a detailed textual analysis to reveal the story's complex undercurrents. In order to deepen the understanding of the textual passages under scrutiny, the discussion (5.) will focus on four themes. Aspects of supra-divinity (i.e., a level of power above the gods) and divine sex/gender, as well as a rejection of the sacred marriage will be further explored. This section will also address the rivalry between Ištar and Marduk both in the night sky and in terms of their military competence. A final summary will demonstrate how *Enūma eliš* radically redefines the goddess Ištar (6.). In its mission to diminish Ištar's status the mythical narrative pursues a strategy of anonymization, deconstruction, recontextualization, delegitimization and subordination.

When dealing with ancient literary texts, absolute certainty is impossible to achieve. The same applies to the findings of this article. Here, an abductive approach has been taken. Unlike induction, it does not build from the small elements up, nor does it set out with a set of rules as is the case of deductive logic. Rather, abduction bases its case on the *best explanation* (e.g., Douven 2021). It weighs competing explanations against each other. Ockham's Razor is an important principle for distinguishing the better explanation from merely a good one: an explanation that requires fewer premises is typically better than one that requires more.

As this article takes an abductive approach, it also invites competing arguments and alternative perspectives on the material. The arguments presented here may be the most compelling at present. However, if one thing is certain in the study of ancient cultures: nothing is fixed forever – not even the stars in *Enūma eliš*.

2 Anu Adopts Marduk's Bow and Turns Her into a Constellation

It was first suggested by Wayne Horowitz (1998: 124) that Ištar could be dealt with in *Enūma eliš* without being mentioned by name.⁴ He referred to her with respect to the passage in which Anu gives three names to Marduk's bow after the hero's victory and enthronement in Babylon.⁵ This finding provides the starting point for the present re-examination of this passage. It will be shown that the bow is indeed a goddess (2.1), and that the goddess is Ištar or, more precisely, Ištar of Elam (2.2). The final section will explore how Marduk acquires Ištar's military skill and power (2.3).

4 A tentative reference to this passage can already be found in Walker 1983: 147 n. 14.

5 See also Rochberg 2007: 439; Gabriel 2014: 304 n. 260; Debourse 2022: 312.

2.1 *The Bow Is a Goddess*

The catasterism of Marduk's bow is described in the text of *Enūma elīš* as follows:⁶

VI 84	<i>īmūrū-ma qašta(ḡesban) kī nuk- kulat binûta</i>	They (the assembled gods) saw the bow, how ingeniously the construction was made.
VI 85	<i>epšēt iteppušu inaddû abbūšu</i>	His fathers praised the handiworks that he had made again and again.
VI 86	<i>išši-ma ʿānu ina puḥur ilānī iqabbi</i>	He raised the bow – Anu, in the assembly of the gods – he spoke,
VI 87	<i>qašta(ḡesban) ittašiq šī lū mārī</i>	(after) kissing the bow: “She is to be my daughter.” ⁷
VI 88	<i>ibbi-ma ša qašti(ḡesban) kīam šumīša</i>	He gave to the bow the following names:
VI 89	<i>išu arik lū ištēnum-ma šanû lū kašid</i>	The first is “The wood is long,” the second is “He will be successful,” the
VI 90	<i>šalšu šumša qašti(mulban) ina šamê ušāpi</i>	third is – “Star-Bow” – he made appear in the sky. ⁸
VI 91	<i>ukīn-ma gisgallaša itti ilānī athêša</i>	(Thus) he established its/her celestial position among the gods, its/her companions.

⁶ Transliteration is based on Heinrich 2021d.

⁷ A translation reflecting the style of the Akkadian text is difficult for VI 86f. because of the elaborate phrasing. The grammatical tense of the three predicates indicates that the sequence of events differs from the textual order. It is so: Anu raises the bow (*išši*: preterite), he kisses it (*ittašiq*: perfect), then he speaks (*iqabbi*: present). By re-arranging the lines, the author was able to create an artful *apokoinou* construction. Here, the phrase ʿānu ina puḥur ilānī (“Anu, in the assembly of the gods”) is placed in the middle of the line so that it can refer to both predicates simultaneously. Anu “raised” (*išši*) the bow and “spoke” (*iqabbi*) in the assembly of the gods. The creative rearrangement explains why the direct speech (*šī lū mārī*, “She is to be my daughter”) does not follow immediately after the verb “to speak,” as one would expect.

⁸ The naming of the bow, intertextual references, and the explication of the implied etiology of an astral omen are the subject of a tightly focused analysis in Gabriel 2014: 299–306; id. 2018a: 170–3.

A number of textual features substantiate the idea that the bow is indeed a female deity. There is above all Anu addressing the bow as his “daughter” (e.g., Walker 1983: 147 n. 14; Horowitz 1998: 124; Cooley 2013: 152; Gabriel 2014: 304 n. 260; Debourse 2022: 312). This relationship is a strand of the Ištar tradition and can be found, e.g., in the astronomical text *Astrolabe B*, a source that links Ištar to the Star-Bow (see 2.2). In *Enūma elīš*, however, Anu’s statement is a declarative speech act: Anu adopts Ištar by pronouncing the adoption formula (Cooley 2013: 152). The performative character of the statement is conveyed in the modal particle *lū* which either confirms the new status of the bow (affirmative) or articulates the intended outcome of the process (precativ). The affective action of kissing highlights the new relationship between Anu and the bow. Both the term “daughter” (*mārtu*) and the kiss are strong indicators that the bow is to be understood as a female.

We subsequently learn that the female in question will enjoy a privilege only granted to gods (and deified kings):⁹ she, too, will be an astral body. Furthermore, the gods are called the “companions” (*athû*) of the bow-(star)/daughter, indicating her divine status (Gabriel 2014: 304). The identification of the bow with a (divine) female entity works well in Akkadian because *qaštu* (“bow”) is grammatically feminine. It is not entirely clear when the bow becomes divine. Is the bow a divine entity because it was Marduk who created it, or does Anu’s adoption of the bow as his “daughter” complete the process? We do know that the catasterism happens only after the bow has been addressed as Anu’s – divine – daughter.

2.2 *The Bow Is Ištar of Elam*

Having established that the bow is a goddess, the question arises as to whether she can be associated with Ištar. While the planet Venus is Ištar’s usual astral manifestation, an alternative tradition that links her to the constellation of the Bow¹⁰ is found in a variety of sources from different locations and historical periods (see Tab. 1).

9 See, e.g., Steinkeller 2013.

10 The term ^{mul}ban refers to the back or southern part of the modern constellation Canis Major (Horowitz 2014: 111; Kolev 2013: 268).

TABLE 1 Equations of the Bow constellation with Ištar

Source	Date / provenance	(Preliminary, latest) edition	Variant of Ištar
Prayer to the Gods of the Night (AO 6769)	Old Babylonian, provenance unknown	Wilcke 2007: 225–8	Ištar of Elam
Star Catalogue HS 1897	Middle Babylonian, Nippur	Oelsner and Horowitz 1997; Horowitz 2014: 102–5	Ištar of Elam
Astrolabe B (= KAV 218 = VAT 9416)	Middle Assyrian, Assur	Horowitz 2014: 29–42; Kolev 2013: 150–67	Ištar of Elam, daughter of Anu
MUL.APIN	1st millennium BCE (or earlier)	Hunger and Pingree 1999	Ištar of Elam, daughter of Enlil
Sm 755 + (parallel text to Astrolabe B)	Neo-Assyrian, unknown provenance	Horowitz 2014: 73–6	Ištar of Elam, daughter of Anu
K 7992 (parallel to K 7931, see below)	Neo-Assyrian, Nineveh	eBL 2020	Ištar of Elam, daughter of ‘Sin’?
K 7931 (line reconstructed in eBL 2023)	Neo-Assyrian, Nineveh	Horowitz 2014: 184–8	[Ištar of Elam?, daughter of NN]
Sm 1492 (unidentified astronomical text)	Neo-Assyrian, Nineveh	Horowitz 2014: 152f.	Ištar of Elam
BM 55502 (parallel text to Astrolabe B)	Neo-Babylonian, provenance unknown	Oelsner and Horowitz 1997; Horowitz 2014: 102–5	Ištar of Elam, daughter of Sîn
The List of Stars and Deities (= BM 42262 = 5R 46 = 1881, 701.4)	Neo-Babylonian, probably from Borsippa ^a	Wee 2016: 161–4; eBL 2022	Ištar of Babylon

a See Wee 2016: 161, 164.

In nearly all of these cases,¹¹ the constellation is Ištar of Elam (^d*ištar elamātu*),¹² which explains the second astral form of the goddess. What looks to be an early etiology of the constellation is preserved at the end of the fragmentary Old Babylonian text *Girra and Elamātum* (Walker 1983): the god of fire, Girra, defeats an entity called “the (female) Elamite” (*elamātum*), which the divine king Enlil then transforms into a constellation.¹³ It appears that this was a *Vorlage* for the passage in *Enūma elīš* (e.g., Sonik 2009: 86; Cooley 2013: 129), with Anu taking on Enlil’s role as star-maker.¹⁴

In *Enūma elīš*, Marduk fashions the Bow, and thus the goddess Ištar, in what is possibly his first act of creation (Gabriel 2014: 239). Following his first elevation,¹⁵ he constructs the bow as his first weapon. The wording of the lines foreshadows the bow’s future astral nature:¹⁶

11 The only exception to the rule is the late Neo-Babylonian text, probably from Borsippa (near Babylon), which presents the Star-Bow as belonging to Ištar of Babylon. This tradition is clearly secondary, however, and strives to elevate the Babylonian version of the goddess by assigning a prominent astral form to her.

12 Little is known about this goddess (see Horowitz 2014: 75 for an overview). A festival associated with Ištar of Elam was held in the sixth month of the year. It involved the ritual cleansing of goddesses by(?) the divine River Ordeal (e.g., Cohen 1993: 104f., 322). The link between the constellation of the Bow and Elam is also attested in astral omens, e.g., in the series *Enuma Anu Enlil* (e.g., W 22730/5:obv. 23’; von Weiher 1988: 191).

13 For a discussion of this passage in *Girra and Elamātum*, see also Cooley 2013: 127–30.

14 The possible borrowings from *Girra and Elamātum* in *Enūma elīš* and the transformation of the *Erzählstoff* deserve further analysis, which is beyond the scope of this article. Wisnom (2019: 58 n. 61) suggests influences from *Girra and Elamātum* in the *Anzû Epic*, which is a known *Vorlage* for *Enūma elīš*.

There are indications that the author of *Enūma elīš* could have borrowed directly from the story of *Girra and Elamātum*. Tiāmtu’s king Kingu, for example, gives his subjects powers against Girra (I 161 and parallels), even though Girra is not in the story. Only at the end of the text does Marduk receive the name Girra (VII 115–118). In the exegesis of this name, we learn that Marduk “built ingenious things” (*ibannâ nīklāti*, VII 116) in the context of the battle against Tiāmtu. The Semitic root *nkl* denotes an ingenious creative competence that in *Enūma elīš* is ascribed to Marduk (Gabriel 2014: 204f., 238f.; before his birth, Ea possesses this power: I 62). Surely it is not a coincidence that the same root is used in line v 84 (*nukkulat*) to describe the bow, the decisive weapon against Tiāmtu, as a product of Marduk’s ingenuity.

15 Here (IV 3–18), Marduk is granted royal power, albeit conditionally. First, he must rescue the gods by killing Tiāmtu. Then he will become king permanently. For the different stages of Marduk’s rise, see Gabriel 2014: 328–54; 2024: 182–9.

16 Transliteration is based on Heinrich 2021c.

IV 35	<i>ibšim-(ma) qašta kakkašu u'addi</i>	He fashioned – a bow – he designated as his weapon.
IV 36	<i>mulmullu uštarkiba ukīnši matna</i>	He mounted (it) with an arrow and he set the string firm on it (= the bow).

The Akkadian term for “arrow” (*mulmullu*) represents a reduplicated form of the sign MUL, which on its own stands for Sumerian **mul** (“star, constellation”). This use may therefore be imitating that the catasterism of the bow was part of its nature from the beginning. Such an artful way of expressing the nature of a thing would be in keeping with the text’s style, which frequently makes use of the polysemy of the cuneiform writing system (especially in the interpretation of names, e.g., Gabriel 2014: 268–306). Consequently, Anu could be acting at the behest of Marduk when he turns the bow into a constellation.

If the bow embodies Ištar, the text implies that Marduk is here to be understood as her father. Anu’s subsequent adoption of the bow/Ištar kills two proverbial birds with one well-aimed stone. First, it removes the conflict between the narrative etiology and the celestial observation that the constellation of the Bow is located in the Path of Anu, a section of the night-sky that is Anu’s domain.¹⁷ Second, it harmonizes the tradition of Ištar (of Elam) as Anu’s daughter (see Tab. 1) with the narrative of *Enūma eliš*, in which she is Marduk’s creation (thus already Cooley 2013: 152). The adoption transforms the relationships among the members of the divine family, acknowledging the known ties between Ištar and Anu while at the same time establishing Marduk as the true, “original” father of the goddess. When the gods appreciate the ingenuity (*nukkulat*, VI 84) of the bow, they appreciate Marduk’s competence in creating a deity.¹⁸

2.3 *Martial Competence*

The bow plays an important role in Marduk’s victory over Tīāmtu; it propels the arrow that decides her fate (IV 101f.).¹⁹ As reconstructed above, the bow most

17 This according to the tradition of MUL.APIN (Hunger and Pingree 1999: 51). The Astrolabe tradition locates the Bow in the path of Ea (e.g., Horowitz 2014: 103) as does the astrological series *Enuma Anu Enlil* Tablet 51 (Reiner/Pingree 1981, 52f.; Hunger/Pingree 1999: 52).

18 The Akkadian root *nkl* is reserved for the most elaborate creations in the epic: Ea’s incantation that enables him to defeat Apsû, the cosmos, humankind, and eventually the bow (see also Gabriel 2014: 192 n. 31, 204f.).

19 Interestingly, the constellation of the Arrow is linked to the god Ninurta (e.g., Mayer 2005) whose defeat of the Anzû bird known from the *Anzû Epic* is the *Vorlage* for Marduk’s

likely represents a manifestation of Ištar. In this context, the bow can easily be interpreted as highlighting Ištar's warrior aspects. Therefore, possessing the bow is another aspect of Marduk's elevation: It is Ištar, embodied in the bow and guided by Marduk's hand, who fights against Tiāmtu. While this idea is only implied in the epic, an explicit reference to it is found in a hymn to Ninurta, which was handed down through manuscripts from the first millennium BCE (Fadhil and Jiménez 2023):²⁰

49	<i>ina šumēlika tašbat-ma qašatka</i>	In your left (hand) you (= Ninurta)
	<i>ašaretta</i>	grasped your preeminent bow,
50	<i>guše'a bēlet saḫmašāti u tuquntī</i>	(that is) Guše'a, the lady of devastation
		and battle,
51	<i>šākinat sikipti kāšīdat ayyābi</i>	the one who fashions repulse, who
	<i>mukannišat ašūti</i>	defeats the enemy, who make stiffness
		bow down,
52	<i>ša asakka ana kašādīšu kīma šurīpi</i>	who made the asag demon dissolve
	<i>ušḫarmiṭu</i>	like ice in order to defeat him,
53	<i>māt nukurti naḫḫarša kīma kulbābi</i>	who crushed the land of the foe in its
	<i>imēsu</i>	entirety like an ant.

The bow here is Ištar in her warrior aspect, as made explicit in the name Guše'a (a warrior goddess who merged with Ištar)²¹ and in the additional characteristics of the weapon. The short passage also contains a fascinating reinterpretation of Ninurta mythology. The story of the defeat of the **asag** demon is best known through a Sumerian text dating from the early second millennium BCE (or earlier), *Lugal-e*, or *Ninurta's Exploits*.²² As the text's modern title indicates, Ninurta is the hero of the tale who crushes the demon. In above hymn to Ninurta, the feat is attributed to Ištar,²³ but she receives no

battle in *Enūma elīš* (e.g., Lambert 1986). Marduk also absorbs features from this important divine hero, and a more detailed investigation of their merger might shed some welcome additional light on the reference to the Arrow here.

20 Transliteration after Fadhil and Jiménez 2023: 201.

21 See, e.g., Lambert 2003–2004: 21f.; Fadhil and Jiménez 2023: 210. The “whirl dance” (*gūštu*) possibly connects Guše'a and Agushaya, another variant of Ištar (see, e.g., Farber 1977: 142f.; Groneberg 1997b: 93 n. 86).

22 Editions: Van Dijk 1983; Seminara 2001.

23 The association of the hero's weapons with Guše'a/Ištar in the Ninurta hymn is not an isolated case. A syncretistic hymn to Ištar contains echoes of the same story (defeating

credit (i.e., exaltation) for her effort. She is the facilitating bow, the instrument of power, but Ninurta is the agent who acts and wins the victory over *asag*.

A similar pattern underlies *Enūma eliš*. Again, Ištar's status is that of a tool of a male deity. As a bow she fights Tiamtu and defeats her, but the agent of the battle is Marduk. It is worth noting that Ištar/the bow is Marduk's creation; her military power is due to Marduk's ingenious design of the bow/Ištar, further diminishing her contribution to the victory and her individual divine agency.²⁴ For Ištar, as a goddess of war, agency would have been crucial. In the new context, however, she has lost all agency, which now resides only with Marduk. Ištar has become a *secondary agent*²⁵ of Marduk. Marduk, as the primary or authoritative agent, acts through her.²⁶

The author has found a way of how to make Ištar a part of Marduk's power without merging the two deities. Over time, Marduk has absorbed several male deities, assuming even their names, thus becoming those gods and taking over their domain of power (see, e.g., Gabriel 2014: 297f.). The one apparently insurmountable difference in Ištar's case is her female sex.²⁷ While male deities can merge with Marduk more 'naturally,' the narrative precludes this option for goddesses, so Ištar is reconstituted as a creation and a tool of Marduk. As such, she is subordinate to the superior male god.

The result can be compared to that of a more regular fusion, e.g., with Ea or Enlil: in those instances Marduk absorbs the qualities of these deities, who will

the *asag* demon; see Lambert 2003–2004: 22:17). There Ištar as Guše'a(!) causes the "wall of the mountain" (*dūr šadī*) to collapse and the "stone(s) of the mountain" (*abān šadī*) to "melt" (*iḫillūši*). The term *abān šadī* denotes (semi)precious stones that come from the mountains in contrast to glass objects with the same appearance, the "stone(s) from the kiln" (*abān kūri*; see, e.g., Thavapalan 2020). Accordingly, this is the same or a very similar story as in *Lugal-e*, in which the victorious hero decides the destiny of the defeated stone army of *asag* (thus determining their material characteristics and technical processing).

Another possible connection between Guše'a/Ištar-as-the-bow (or the constellation of the Bow) and the *asag* story may have been preserved in a Late Babylonian prayer to the goddess Beltiya (MNB 1848). Obv. iii 26 states that the Star Bow defeated "the strong ones/strength" (*dannūti*; Debourse 2022: 140), which could be a reference to the stone warriors of *asag*. It would be interesting to learn more about this strand of the tradition involving Ištar-as-Guše'a, and whether and how it relates to Innana's victory over Mount Ebiḫ (known, e.g., from the Sumerian epic *Innana and Ebiḫ*; editions: Attinger 1998; 2021b). A first comparison of Ninurta's battle against *asag* and Innana's battle against Mount Ebiḫ has been presented by Karahashi (2004), who traces parallels and differences.

24 It is possible that IV 35 describes the moment the bow/goddess is turned into Marduk's instrument, when it tells that "he designated it/her as his weapon" (*kakkašu u'addi*).

25 My usage of the term differs from that of Pongratz-Leisten 2011.

26 For the concept of authoritative agency (in the context of creation) in contrast to the work of a demiurge who creates the cosmos with his own hands, see Gabriel 2014: 168.

27 On the sex/gender aspect of Marduks syncretisms in *Enūma eliš* and other texts, see, for example, Fadhil and Jiménez 2022: 256.

henceforth be recognized only as an aspect of the almighty king. By comparison, in *Enūma eliš* Marduk has absorbed all of Ištar's abilities and her agency as a goddess of war.

2.4 *The Bow Becomes a Constellation*

The catasterism of the bow/Ištar is an indication of the high value placed on the military competence it embodies. One could even read it as a minor elevation for Ištar, who is thereby admitted to the exclusive circle of astral deities. She even accrues additional names, usually a mark of superiority as it also involves the transfer of power, but in Ištar's case the mechanism does not work the usual way.

As has been shown (Gabriel 2014: 299–303; id. 2018a: 170–2), the first two of the three names form an omen: if “the wood is long” (1st name)²⁸ then “he is to succeed” (2nd name). The apodosis does not refer to the bow/Ištar,²⁹ but to Marduk and his past and future victories. Here *Enūma eliš* displays a striking structural (and lexical) resemblance to the first entry in the *Multābiltu catalogue*, which establishes the general divinatory relationship between “length/duration” (*ariktu*) of the given medium, i.e., a part of the sacrificial animal's entrails, and “success” (*kašittu*) for the omen's addressee (ibid.: 171f.). The abstract pattern is then followed by a concrete example of a king on a campaign, and here, too, the connotations with Anu's second name for the bow (“he is to succeed” *lū kašid*) cannot be overlooked. Accordingly, it is Marduk's military prowess that is proclaimed by the omen, which is manifest in the constellation of the Bow/Ištar, representing the weapon with which he defeats the greatest of all enemies, Tiāmtu. Ištar as the Bow points thus to Marduk as the master of battle and war.³⁰ Having lost her agency, Ištar as the Bow has become not only a tool of Marduk, but also a signifier of his supremacy.

28 The Akkadian sentence “The wood is long” (*išu arik*) is a sign-by-sign translation of the Sumerian term *ĝeš-gid₂-da*, a Sumerian expression which can denote a bow or a spear. The author of *Enūma eliš* arrived at *ĝeš-gid₂-da* via quasi-synonymy between this term and *ĝeš-ban* (“bow”; Gabriel 2014: 299f.). However, reading the bow as a manifestation of Ištar gives us access to an even wider spectrum of possible interpretations, including Ištar's association with the Wagon constellation (e.g., Lambert 2003–2004: 21, ll. 7–8). The Wagon in Sumerian is written as *mul-mar-gid₂-da*. The first element, MAR, consists of the sign G1Š plus two further wedges (mostly in the form of a ME). The bow's first name – the protasis of the omen – could thus be a graphemic reinterpretation of another astral embodiment of the goddess.

29 The apodosis forming the second name (“he is to succeed” [my emphasis]) cannot refer to “bow” (*qaštu*) because the grammatical gender of the Akkadian term is feminine.

30 The relationship between deities and astral omens is also the subject of Rochberg 2011: 126–30.

3 Tiāmtu Enthrones Kingu

A philological analysis will allow us to extract the *Stoff* or *Erzählstoff* from the relevant passage in *Enūma eliš* (2.1.). I use the term *Stoff*/*Erzählstoff* as defined by the classical philologist C. Zgoll (2019; id. 2020). When a specific medium (text, image, movie, ...) tells a story, it gives one version of a *Stoff*, while another medium provides another one.

'The' *Stoff* is not a singular entity, something uniquely undistinguishable; it must instead be understood as a 'polymorphous' phenomenon, as uncomfortable as this may seem for now. Every change in individual or societal interests, ideas, interpretations, conditions, preferences etc. can lead to modifications in a mythical *Stoff*. These modifications can range from the tiniest interventions to substitution, new insertion, or deletion of individual elements, also fundamental revisions of certain narrative units, or in the structure of a narrative sequence overall. Each *Stoff* variant adds a new variation of those already in existence and in doing so contributes to fundamental *polymorphy* of a *Stoff*. (C. Zgoll 2020: 22)

The *Stoff* focus is productive in the case of Kingu's enthronement as it allows for an analysis of the sequence of events that define his rise to kingship and to locate it in the larger Mesopotamian tradition. The outcome of this analysis (3.1) will form the basis for a discussion (3.2) of our understanding of Kingu's installation as king as a variation on the idea of the sacred marriage, and the role of Tiāmtu in this context as a variation on the traditional role of Ištar.

3.1 Procedure

After her husband, Apsû, is killed by Ea and her waters are stirred up by Marduk, Tiāmtu is enraged. Her anger divides the gods into two groups. One group is ruled by Apsû's grandson Anšar. The other group is controlled by his widow, Tiāmtu (Sonik 2008; Gabriel 2014: 320–3). Tiāmtu, however, does not become their sovereign ruler but rather chooses from among her followers a new king to take up the reins. The account of the new divine ruler's installation comes at the end of Tablet I and is rather brief (especially when compared to the tripartite elevation of Marduk):³¹

³¹ Transliteration is based on Heinrich 2021a.

I 147	<i>ina ilānī bukrīša šūt iškunūši puḥra</i>	Among the gods, her children, who
I 148	<i>ušašqi ^dkingu ina birišunu šâšu</i> <i>ušrabbīš</i>	have set up an assembly for her, she elevated Kingu – among them – she made him the greatest.
I 149	<i>ālikūt maḥri pān ummāni mu'errūt</i> <i>puḥri</i>	She entrusted to him command of the army, leading the assembly, carrying
I 150	<i>našê kakkī tišbūtu dekū ananta</i>	weapons in combat, unleashing battle,
I 151	<i>šūt tamḥāri rab sikkatūti</i>	the (way) of war, and high command.
I 152	<i>ipqid-ma qātuššu ušēšibaššu ina</i> <i>karri</i>	She entrusted (all) to his hand. She made him sit on a throne:
I 153	<i>addi tâka ina puhur ilānī ušarbika</i>	"I have cast an incantation for you – in the assembly of the gods – I have made you greatest.
I 154	<i>malikūt ilānī gimrassunu qātukka</i> <i>ušmalli</i>	I have made the kingship of the gods become full in your hands.
I 155	<i>lū šurbâtā-ma ḥā'irī edū atta</i>	You are indeed made great! You are my only husband/lover.
I 156	<i>lirtabbū zikrūka eli kalīšunu ^dannukī</i>	Your commands will always be more powerful than those of any other Anunaki god."

The stylistic feature of an *apokoinou* in lines I 148 and I 153 places a phrase in the middle of the line which then connects the first and the second sentence by being a part of both. As an example of *brevitas*, it emphasizes the central phrase, that is the specifications "among them" (*ina birišunu*) and "in the assembly of the gods" (*ina puhur ilānī*) respectively. Semantic and stylistic aspects align perfectly in this particular instance, and elsewhere in the text, demonstrating yet again the attention that the author has paid to the form as well as the content of their work.

In order to extract the sequence of events as a *Stoff* variant from I 147–56, hyleme analysis is required. According to this technique, each event is identified, isolated, and then expressed in the format of a single sentence (C. Zgoll 2019: 109–18; 2021: 18–37). This sentence, the *hyleme*, has a fixed structure of **subject – verb – (objects, other parameters)** and is limited to active voice and present tense only (ibid.: 25). Looking for the *Stoff* in this passage pursues two goals at the same time. First, it helps us to see the mere events independent from the artful rendition of the text. Second, we are able to compare the results with other action sequences independent from the language

that is used to tell them. This is especially productive in the (at least) bilingual environment of ancient Mesopotamia.

In a first step, we can extract the following set of hylemes from the above passage (I 147–156):

Hyleme Sequence 1: TIĀMTU ENTHRONES KINGU.

Tiāmtu commands her divine subjects to gather.³²

Tiāmtu's divine subjects gather.

Tiāmtu chooses Kingu from among her divine subjects.

Tiāmtu casts a spell on Kingu.

Tiāmtu places Kingu with the leadership of the army.

Tiāmtu places Kingu in charge of the divine assembly.

Tiāmtu places Kingu on a throne.

Tiāmtu declares Kingu to be her husband/lover (*ḥā'iru*).

Kingu is the king of the gods.

Command of the army and control of the divine assembly are the primary functions of divine kingship. One could therefore merge those two hylemes into one, such as: Tiāmtu makes Kingu the king of the gods. The last hyleme in this sequence does not represent an event, but the permanent result of the previous events. Extracting such a *durative-resultative* hyleme (C. Zgoll 2021: 29) can simplify considerably the task of finding the endpoint of a story or sequence of events (ibid: 34f.). In our case, all events in the sequence lead to Kingu's enthronement and the state of his kingship.

According to the first hyleme, Tiāmtu is shown to be in charge of events, and even the appearance of the other gods in the second hyleme does not change the fact that it is Tiāmtu's sole responsibility to convene the divine assembly, select the new king from among the assembled gods, and then to put him on the throne. Tiāmtu is the *agent* behind each event in the sequence.

Tiāmtu's responsibility has been discussed as an argument used by the author of *Enūma eliš* to delegitimize Kingu's rule (Gabriel 2014: 323). This figure is installed by a female entity, a demerit in and of itself from the text's perspective (see 5.1.). However, in the further course of the epic, it is never criticized *how* Kingu was installed, but *that* Kingu was installed even though he was not qualified for the office.³³

32 I read the phrase “who have set up an assembly for her” (*šūt iškunūši puḫra*) not as a description of the gods taking the initiative but rather in compliance with an external order. Tiāmtu commanded them to come together, hence they “set up an assembly for her” in accordance with her elevated status.

33 Transliteration is based on Heinrich 2021c.

IV 82	<i>ana lā simātīšu taškunīš ana paraš^denūti</i>	(Marduk to Tiāmtu): “You have placed him in the office of rulership for which he is unfit.”
-------	--	---

Combining this observation with the reconstructed hyleme sequence highlights the significance of one aspect of the story. It is Tiāmtu's choice of Kingu that is criticized. She singled him out “among them” (*ina birīšunu*), i.e., she chose him from among her subjects. It is certainly no coincidence that this point is emphasized by way of *apokoinou*. Moreover, the text refers to this aspect again in IV 119. This line qualifies Kingu as *ša irtabbû ina birīšunu*, “who became permanently great among them.”

Not the procedure of his installation is at fault but rather its result: an ill-suited deity has become an incompetent king. Tiāmtu being the agent behind his enthronement, the epic's indictment of Kingu's incompetence is also an indictment against Tiāmtu. Her decision-making is flawed, which delegitimizes her legitimizing power (see also 6.4). Kingu's enthronement is tied to his role as Tiāmtu's *ḫā'iru*: The specific semantics of this term are discussed below (see 3.2). Here, it suffices to know that Kingu is king because he is Tiāmtu's *ḫā'iru*.

If one follows this line of thought, it becomes clear that at the beginning of the story, Tiāmtu is granted a legitimizing power. How could Tiāmtu have been granted this competence? What would have been its source or model? Scholars have proposed a historical background for the events in the narrative or external influences (e.g., from Egypt; Sonik 2009: 93 n. 212; Gabriel 2014: 323 n. 26). In what follows, I argue that the underlying concept has Mesopotamian roots and is in fact based on a venerable southern Mesopotamian tradition. Specifically, it is the concept of the sacred marriage.

3.2 *The Sacred Marriage and Tiāmtu as Ištar*

The idea behind the Mesopotamian sacred marriage is legitimization: the human king is king because the goddess Ištar (Sumerian: Innana) chose him as her husband (e.g., Stol 2016, 643–61). Evidence points to this institution's practice since at least to the middle of the third millennium BCE. For instance, Meš-Ane-pada, king of the cities of Uruk (“Kiš”)³⁴ and Ur, who reigned in the 24th c. BCE, identifies himself in his seal (Meš-Ane-pada 2) as:

34 The title “king of the city of Kiš” as a label of the king of Uruk is discussed in Pomponio 1994; Marchesi and Marchetti 2011, 108; Marchesi 2015, 145.

1	meš ₃ -an-ne ₂ -pa ₃ -da	Meš-Ane-pada, the king of the city of Kiš, the
2	lugal kiše ^{kl}	husband of the Untouchable One.
3	dam nu-geg	

The Sumerian term **nugeg** (“the Untouchable One”) is an honorific title for the goddess Innana/Ištar that characterizes her as the Lady of Heaven (A. Zgoll 1997: 194f.). Thus, Meš-Ane-pada received legitimation as king of Uruk from his marriage to the main goddess of Uruk, Innana/Ištar (ibid.: 192; Wilcke 1976–1980: 81).³⁵

The concept of a special human-divine relationship was expressed in mythical form through the story of Innana and her mortal lover, the shepherd Dumuzi. Numerous love songs about the famous couple have been preserved on cuneiform tablets from the early second millennium BCE (e.g., Sefati 1998); these portray Dumuzi unequivocally as the chosen lover of Innana, who is the king. The king is Innana’s chosen lover, Dumuzi,³⁶ with the nature of their relationship clear, as for example, in *Innana-Dumuzi Z*:³⁷

rev. 12’	ʾša ₃ -ab’-ġa ₂ bi ₂ -in-pa ₃ -de ₃ -en	(Innana:) “I, me, have chosen him in my
	me-e mu-lu ša ₃ -ba-ġen	heart. You are the man of the heart.
rev. 13’	aga zi men ku ₃ saġ-za	I have placed the righteous aga-crown
	ma-ra-ni-ma-al	and the brilliant men-crown for you on
		your head.
...		
rev. 16’	mu-ud-na-mu gu ₂ -da	My bridegroom, let us embrace!”
	ġa ₂ -la ₂ -e-en-de ₃ -en	

The sacred marriage is thus realized in a series of individual steps:

Sequence of Hyleme Patterns 2: INNANA/IŠTAR ENTHRONES A KING.
Innana/Ištar selects <a man> among her human subjects.

35 Other interpretations are possible: The term **nugeg** could refer to a **nugeg**-priestess (Cooper 1986: 98) or to the wife of Mesh-Ane-pada (ibid.; Hallo 1957: 27, 30; Asher-Greve 1985: 128f.).

36 The motif of Innana/Ištar selecting a human king also occurs in the Akkadian *Etana Epic* (i 15 in the OB version, Ms. A obv. 20–21 in the SB version; Haul 2000: 106, 168).

37 Transliteration after Sefati 1998: 282.

Innana/Ištar makes <this man> her husband.
Innana/Ištar makes <this man> the human king.
<This man> is the human king.

The preceding lays out a sequence of *hyleme patterns* (rather than hylemes), defined by the presence of at least one variable (marked by <...>), here the man chosen by Innana/Ištar.³⁸ The hyleme pattern becomes concrete (i.e., it becomes a regular hyleme) each time the goddess decides on a new king.

A comparison of this sequence of hyleme patterns with the hyleme sequence of Kingu's enthronement from *Enūma elīš* (see 3.1) reveals a number of parallels:

TABLE 2 Installation of Kingu and the human king

Kingu	Human king
Tiāmtu commands her divine subjects to gather. Tiāmtu's divine subjects gather. Tiāmtu chooses Kingu from among her divine subjects.	Innana/Ištar selects <a man> from among her human subjects.
Tiāmtu casts a spell on Kingu. Tiāmtu places Kingu with the leadership of the army. Tiāmtu places Kingu in charge of the divine assembly. Tiāmtu places Kingu on a throne. Tiāmtu declares Kingu to be her husband/lover (<i>ḥā'iru</i>).	Innana/Ištar makes <this man> her husband/lover. Innana/Ištar makes <this man> the human king.
Kingu is the king of the gods.	<This man> is the human king.

The account of Kingu's installation offers more detail than the rough pattern I reconstructed for the human king. For our purposes, however, this rough outline is sufficient.

Neither text allows us to establish a definitive chronological sequence between marriage and enthronement; presumably both events happen simultaneously. Either way, to become the husband/lover of Innana/Ištar means

38 For an introduction to hyleme patterns, see also C. Zgoll 2019: 580; 2021: 47f.

to become king. The sequence of steps being roughly equivalent, the two accounts differ in their participating personnel: in one Tiāmtu is the *agent* and Kingu is the divine *patient*; in the other, it is Innana/Ištar who plays the active part, while the passive part is assigned to the human king-to-be.

Comparable actions and relationships make a persuasive case for the following parallel between Tiāmtu and Innana and Kingu and the human king:

TABLE 3 Active and passive participants of enthronement

	Active part	Passive part
Sacred marriage (classic concept)	Innana/Ištar	<A human man>
<i>Enūma eliš</i>	Tiāmtu	The god Kingu

Thus, not only does Tiāmtu embody a distorted version of the mother goddess, as Wisnom (2019: 113) has already shown. She also embodies Innana/Ištar as the superior power that chooses and installs the king. Hence, Kingu’s legitimization is most likely based on a variant of the sacred marriage.

The assertion that *Enūma eliš* here refers to the sacred marriage is further supported by the specific terminology chosen to describe Kingu’s relationship with Tiāmtu: he is her *ḫā’iru*. The meaning of this Akkadian lexeme is along the lines of “husband” and “lover” (CAD H, 31; eBL). Most importantly, the term is largely attested as a qualification of the human king and/or Dumuzi in relation to Ištar (ibid.).³⁹ Its use in *Enūma eliš* can thus be interpreted as a deliberate allusion to the concept of the sacred marriage.

As noted above, *Enūma eliš* does not set out to find flaws in the process in and suggest improvements to the concept of the sacred marriage. It wants to do away with it altogether. The author of the epic is implying that the premise of the procedure is fundamentally flawed because it has allowed the selection of an unfit king. Tiāmtu’s failure to install a capable ruler via the tradition of the sacred marriage is a failure of a system of royal legitimization that is strongly associated with the goddess Innana/Ištar (see 5.2). The postulated parallelism between Tiāmtu and Ištar also requires that Tiāmtu be placed on a level above the other gods, analogous to the higher level Ištar occupies above the human world. Following this line of thought, Tiāmtu must be read as a *supra-divine being*. Supra-divinity, and its implications, will be discussed in 5.1.

39 The text uses the lexeme *ḫā’iru* and its abstract form *ḫā’irūtu* only to denote the relationship between Kingu and Tiāmtu (Gabriel 2014: 322f. n. 23).

4 Marduk Kills a Star and Resurrects It

In this section we will begin with a close reading of the passage in which Marduk destroys and resurrects a star (4.1), followed by a detailed analysis of its textual and hylistic⁴⁰ content. It will be shown that Marduk does cause an astral deity to descend into and return from the netherworld. This deity is the goddess Ištar (4.2).

This section is possibly the most uncertain. Yet, the circumstantial evidence suggests this reading.

4.1 Procedure

After Ea and Anu fail to end the threat posed by Tiāmtu, Marduk volunteers to save the gods from extinction. In return he demands to be given divine kingship, which the other gods duly grant him at the beginning of Tablet IV. His royal privileges and duties are defined, and he is given the power to decree fate: to make things happen through performative speech acts (Gabriel 2014: 258–62; 2018a: 167f.). They then urge him to use his new power (IV 19–26):⁴¹

IV 19	<i>ušzizzū-ma ina birišunu lumāša ištēn</i>	They made a single star stand among them.
IV 20	<i>ana ʿmarūtuk bukrīšunu šunu izzakrū</i>	To Marduk, their child, they (= the assembled gods) spoke (thus):
IV 21	<i>šīmatka bēlu lū maḥrat ilānī-ma</i>	“Your power to decree fate ⁴² equals (the power of) the gods.
IV 22	<i>abātu u banū qibi liktūna</i>	To destroy and to create – command (this), and it will become permanent.
IV 23	<i>epšu pīka liʾabit lumāšu</i>	By the utterance of your mouth (this) star may be destroyed.
IV 24	<i>tūr qibišum-ma lumāšu lišlim</i>	Speak again to it, and the star may be intact again.”
IV 25	<i>iqbī-ma ina pīšu iʾabit lumāšu</i>	He spoke, and by his mouth the star was destroyed.
IV 26	<i>itūr iqbišum-ma lumāšu ittabni</i>	He spoke again to it, and the star was created (again).

40 “Hylistic” means with respect to the narrative material (“Erzählstoff”) that is given by the text.

41 Transliteration is based on Heinrich 2021c.

42 The Akkadian term *šīmtu* has two distinct meanings in *Enūma eliš*. It can mean either “(destined) fate” or “the power to decree fate” (Gabriel 2014: 267f.; 2018a: 168).

To uncover the underlying message of this passage, we will follow a four-step argument:

1) *Lumāšu* as “star”

The Akkadian lexeme *lumāšu* can stand for a “constellation” or for a single “star” (CAD L, 245; Borger 2004: 569).⁴³ The translation most often chosen for the term’s appearance in *Enūma elīš* is “constellation,” and mostly no further explanation for this decision is given.⁴⁴ Exceptions to this choice appear in CAD (L, 245), Bartash (2010: 1091), and Schaudig (2012, 133), which opt for “star.” The singular of the term in IV 19, 23, 24, 25, and 26 is additionally qualified as “single” (*ištēn*) in IV 19. This would be redundant were no specification of semantics of *lumāšu* necessary; the qualification here indicates that the term refers not to a single constellation (for this the singular form would suffice) but rather a single star.⁴⁵

2) The star is an astral deity

From the emic Mesopotamian perspective, a star is not merely a bright spot in the night sky but rather a divine body: stars are the astral manifestations of gods (e.g., Rochberg 2011: 124f.; Schaudig 2012: 133).⁴⁶ The wording of the passage in *Enūma elīš* reflects this view: the star is set “among them” (*ina birīšunu* [IV 19]), referring to the gods of Anšar’s faction. The exact same phrase is also found in the enthronement of Kingu, who is likewise chosen from “among them” (*ina birīšunu* [I 148]), here referring to the gods of Tiamtu’s faction.⁴⁷ The recurrence is significant

43 The specific use of *lumāšu* for zodiacal signs is a later development, see e.g., Ossendrijver 2020: 47.

44 E.g., Vanstiphout 1992: 54 n. 59; Dalley 2000: 250; Foster 2005: 371; Pongratz-Leisten 2011: 158; Kämmerer and Metzler 2012: 203; Seri 2012: 11f.; Cooley 2013: 143; Lambert 2013: 87; Gabriel 2014: 430. Rochberg 2021: 396 is undecided about the matter.

45 Alternatively, Vanstiphout (1992: 54 n. 59) wonders whether *ištēn* could have been inserted to indicate the metonymic usage of *lumāšu* (“constellation”).

46 The divine-celestial relationship, that is, the way in which astral bodies were imagined to relate to Mesopotamian gods, and how these different modes of reference can be categorized is a fertile field of scholarly enquiry. Rochberg distinguishes between embodiment (gods as stars) and representation (stars as gods; Rochberg 2007: 440f.; 2011: 126–30); Pongratz-Leisten 2011: 141f. introduces the aspect of secondary agency for astral bodies. Here, the relationship is clearly one of embodiment.

47 Another term linking the two passages is *bukru* (“child”). The gods of Tiamtu’s party are called “her children” (*bukriša*, I 147); Marduk is called “their child” (*bukrišunu* [IV 20]), i.e., the child of the gathered gods.

since the construction (*ina birišunu*) in particular and the lexeme *biri-* in general occur only in descriptions of Kingu's enthronement (I 148 and its repetitions in II 34; III 38, 96; IV 119), and here in IV 19 (see Talon 2005: 113). The deliberate choice of words connects the selection of Kingu from among the gods of Tiāmtu's faction with the selection of another deity from among the gods of Anšar's faction.⁴⁸

The account of IV 19–26 employs neutral terms such as “to destroy” (*abātu* [IV 22, 23, 25])⁴⁹ and “to create” (*banû* [IV 22, 26]), but also employs *šalāmu* (“to be, become healthy”), which is often applied to living beings in a broader sense (CAD Š/I, 208–19). This is especially true of the use of this verb and the related noun *šulmu* (“health”) in *Enūma elīš*. All attestations⁵⁰ of both terms have the same convalescent connotation.

The precativ *lišlim* (IV 24) is used in parallel with the verb *banû* (IV 22, 26), hinting at the animate quality of the star, who “shall be healthy (again)” (*lišlim* [IV 24]).

The star (*lumāšu*) is a deity chosen from among his/her fellow gods.

3) Destroying the star means killing a deity

When Marduk destroys the star, not only does he make an astral body disappear from the night sky. The act represents the killing of a deity. Support for this reading is found in Schaudig (2012: 134), who notes that “that scene was nothing less than an intimidating proof of absolute power over life and death, even of gods.”⁵¹ This reading is further supported by the gods' speech to Marduk in IV 21–22, in which they specify “your power to decree fate” (*šimatka*) as the power “to destroy and to create” (*abātu*

48 A connection between the fate of Kingu and that of the astral deity also exists in VI 13–14, when Marduk calls for an assembly to find the one god guilty of starting the war: *linnadnam-ma ištēn aḥūšun | šū li"abbīt-ma nišū lippatqā* “A single brother of them (= the gods) shall be given. He, he shall be destroyed, and people shall be created.” It is the only other occurrence of the lexeme *ištēn* in *Enūma elīš* that does not involve counting (as in VI 60 and 89). The precativ *li"abbīt* in VI 14 harks back to *li"abit* in IV 23. Finally, the semantic field of destruction and (re)creation is central to both passages (see also Gabriel 2014: 262).

49 The lexeme *abātu* (“to destroy”) can be followed by both animate and inanimate direct “objects” (CAD A/I, 43). Thus, in *Enūma elīš* (VII 90), Marduk is characterized as *ābīt ilānī ša tiāmti ēpiš nišī ina mimmešun*, “the one who destroyed the gods of Tiāmtu and created humanity from all of them.” Once again, the text employs the sequence of destruction before creation (see also n. 48).

50 Attestations of *šalāmu* occur in IV 24, VII 150; of *šulmu* in IV 34, V 79, 99 (Talon 2005: 122f.).

51 Similarly Gabriel 2014: 261.

(*u*) *banû*). From a Mesopotamian perspective, that is the quintessential meaning of *šimtu* (see also A. Zgoll and Lämmerhirt 2009–2011: 147), the “power over life and death” (Schaudig 2012: 134). Life and death are categories relevant only to living beings. To destroy a living being means to kill it.

4) To kill an astral deity means to send him/her to the netherworld

The Mesopotamians believed that when a person dies, he or she descends to the netherworld. The same path is also taken by the astral deities, who also descend to the netherworld, although these rise again in the east. The myth of Innana’s/Ištar’s descent presents the goddess dying on that very journey, only to then be resurrected so that she, too, can rise again (see 4.2 for details). This example shows that the initial, netherworld-bound journey of astral deities could be interpreted as their death. By contrast to such depictions, the text of *Enūma elīš* contains no explicit description of a journey through the netherworld. In general, the text is silent about the netherworld (e.g., Horowitz 1998: 125; Seri 2012: 26). The dramatic events of a star being destroyed and reborn are couched in such thoroughly neutral terms as “to destroy” (*abātu*), “to create” (*banû*), and “to become healthy/whole” (*šalāmu*). Use of the passive voice further obscures the nature of events. Despite this, certain clues in the text enable the reconstruction of the implied journey.

As a first indication of this, it is striking that *lumāšu* is used no less than five times in the space of eight lines (IV 19–26). The absence of lexical variance suggests that it is same deity that is referred to and, in light of what has been argued, it is the same deity that is being killed and resurrected. In this context, *šalāmu* informs the reader that the divinity is returned to its original state. The pattern of change is cyclical and described in the text can therefore be expressed as $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow A$.

This pattern differs substantially from the creation pattern elsewhere in *Enūma elīš* (Seri 2012: 7; Cooley 2013: 143). This standard creation pattern also begins with the killing of a living being, but here that being does not return to its original state. Thus, elsewhere in the poem Apsû dies and is transformed into the groundwater ocean; Tiamtu is killed and her corpse torn in half to form two new regions of the cosmos, and Kingu ends up as the raw material from which Marduk creates humankind. All three transformations follow a linear pattern, which can be expressed as $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$. The more general terminology of destruction and creation in IV 19–26 and the order in which these occur (destruction coming first) do

locate the events of this passage in a broader context of creation-from-destruction, albeit with a fundamental difference from the other cases: while in State A the astral being is alive and visible in the night sky, the text offers no description of State B: the equal of death in the cases of Apsû, Tiāmtu, and Kingu. But what about the unnamed astral deity? A reasonable case could be made for the assumption that it must be a negative condition, that is, the opposite of *šalāmu*. Its destruction, moreover, implies that the astral being is no longer visible in the night sky. Invisibility and death ultimately suggest the deity's absence from the world of the living and presence in the netherworld. Marduk's command brings about the death of an astral being that consequently descends into the netherworld. Marduk's resurrection of the deity causes it to rise again.

In sum, there is good reason to reconstruct the following sequence of hyleme patterns for *Enūma elīš* IV 19–26 (Marduk's "first elevation"), with <...> denoting the required variable:

Sequence of Hyleme Patterns 3a: Marduk sends <the astral deity NN> to the netherworld and brings him/her back.

The assembled gods choose <the astral deity NN> from among their midst.

The assembled gods call upon Marduk to "destroy" <the astral deity NN> with his utterance.

The assembled gods call upon Marduk to resurrect <the astral deity NN> with his utterance.

Marduk commands <the astral deity NN> to descend into the netherworld.

<The astral deity NN> descends into the netherworld.

<The astral deity NN> dies.

Marduk revives <the astral deity NN> by his command.

Marduk commands <the astral deity NN> to rise from the netherworld.

<The astral deity NN> rises from the netherworld.

<The astral deity NN> is in the night sky again.

This reconstruction has an important consequence for our interpretation of the nature of Marduk's speech act. What looks like a declarative speech act (thus Gabriel 2014: 260f.; 2018a: 168) turns out to be a directive speech act. Marduk orders an astral deity to set and rise again. In view of *Enūma elīš*, this may be the first time an astral body has ever been set down and risen; Marduk would establish this movement here as a general pattern.

4.2 *Marduk Kills and Resurrects Ištar*

There remains the matter of identifying the unnamed deity, the variable in the Sequence of Hyleme Patterns 3a above. The sun god, Shamash, and the moon god, Sîn, can be excluded as candidates. A clear distinction between the sun and moon on the one hand and *lumāšus* on the other can be seen in *Enūma eliš*. At the beginning of Tablet v, Marduk assigns to each of the victorious gods a star in the night sky but deals with the sun and the moon in a separate section (see, e.g., Horowitz 1998: 114–7).

Of the remaining deities, only a handful are manifest in a single celestial body: Marduk (Jupiter), Nergal (Mars), Ninurta (Mercury or Saturn), Nabu (Mercury), and Ištar (Venus).⁵² Only Nergal and Ištar have myths that describe their descent into the netherworld, which refer in part to their stars' setting in the west. The myth of Nergal is extant in two variants of a literary text known as *Nergal and Ereškigal*. The older version dates from the 14th century BCE and survives in a manuscript from Amarna. The younger version dates from the first millennium BCE; its manuscripts are from Sultantepe and Uruk (Izre'el 1993; Ponchia and Luukko 2013: xcii). In both versions, Nergal enters the netherworld and eventually marries the ruling goddess Ereškigal. As her husband, he is now the new lord of the netherworld. The older version presents his actions as a conquest, while in the younger version Nergal is bound to the netherworld because he had sexual intercourse with Ereškigal. Neither story has him return to the upperworld, and in contrast to Ištar's experience, Nergal's travels in the netherworld are not equated with his death.

Innana's/Ištar's myth is best known from the Sumerian song *Innana's Descent* (or according to its incipit: *Angalta*)⁵³ and its much younger Akkadian version *Ištar's Descent*. Both the Sumerian and the Akkadian versions, roughly a millennium apart, have Innana dying in the netherworld, requiring her resurrection (A. Zgoll 2020: 118f.). There is textual evidence to suggest the myth's origins may reach as far back as the middle of the third millennium BCE (A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll 2020a: 484f.), and probably even earlier than that (e.g., Szarzynska 1987; A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll 2020b: 755–60), making it one of the most enduring myths of the Mesopotamian culture, with a span nearly equal to that of cuneiform itself.

52 The movement of the planets and of the moon and sun, in contrast to the apparently immobile status of the fixed stars, was perceived by the Mesopotamians as a sign of their autonomy (e.g., Horowitz 1998: 153; Rochberg 2010: 326). Accordingly, these autonomous astral bodies were identified as gods.

53 Most recent editions: Attinger 2019; Cupéry 2021.

In this myth, Innana/Ištar enters the netherworld to obtain its powers for the benefit of mankind (A. Zgoll 2020: 125–7, 141f.). She dies in the effort and must be revived (at her own command). Innana then returns to the world of the living, bringing with her the powers of the netherworld (ibid., 143–5), in particular fertility and the power over life and death (ibid., 138–42).

The following sequence of condensed hylemes, or hyper-hylemes (see also ibid., 106f., 118–22), can be extracted from the text of *Innana’s Descent* (*Angalta*):

Hyleme Sequence 4: INNANA ACQUIRES THE POWERS OF THE NETHERWORLD.

- Innana plans to acquire the powers of the netherworld.
- Innana descends into the netherworld.
- Innana takes off her instruments of power.
- Innana dies.
- Ritual experts revive Innana at her command.
- Innana acquires the powers of the netherworld.
- Innana rises from the netherworld.

A comparison with the hyleme sequence extracted from the relevant passage in *Enūma elīš* (IV 19–26) exposes the following differences and parallels:

TABLE 4 Descents to the netherworld

<i>Enūma elīš</i> (Sequence of Hyleme Patterns 3a)	<i>Innana’s Descent</i> (Hyleme Sequence 4)
The assembled gods choose <the astral deity NN> from among themselves.	Innana plans to acquire the powers of the netherworld.
The assembled gods call upon Marduk to “destroy” <the astral deity NN> with his utterance.	
The assembled gods call upon Marduk to resurrect <the astral deity NN> with his utterance.	
Marduk commands <the astral deity NN> to descend into the netherworld.	Innana descends into the netherworld.
<The astral deity NN> descends into the netherworld.	Innana takes off her instruments of power.
<The astral deity NN> dies.	Innana dies.

TABLE 4 Descents to the netherworld (*cont.*)

<i>Enūma eliš</i> (Sequence of Hyleme Patterns 3a)	<i>Innana's Descent</i> (Hyleme Sequence 4)
Marduk revives <the astral deity NN> by his command .	Ritual experts revive Innana at Enki's (= her) command .
Marduk commands <the astral deity NN> to rise from the netherworld.	Innana acquires the powers of the netherworld.
<The astral deity NN > rises from the netherworld .	Innana rises from the netherworld .

Parallels in **bold**

The key difference between the two sequences involves agency. While in *Enūma eliš* Marduk takes the active role, commanding the unnamed astral deity first to be destroyed and then to be restored (i.e. to descend and rise again),⁵⁴ in her own myth Innana descends into the netherworld of her own accord. Furthermore, Marduk destroys and resurrects the astral deity in order to demonstrate his newly acquired power of performative speech acts (*šimtu*).

Important parallels also exist between the two stories. As noted above, both the astral deity in *Enūma eliš* and Innana in her own myth suffer death and must be brought back to life. This resurrection must be performed by another party (Marduk or ritual experts),⁵⁵ as the dead deity is without agency. In the Sumerian song *Innana's Descent* this loss of agency is marked grammatically by Innana's change from the class of living beings to an inanimate object (A. Zgoll 2020: 118f.).

In light of the above findings, the astral deity in *Enūma eliš* is the goddess Ištar.⁵⁶ The text of *Enūma eliš* emphasizes the death of the deity by using the

54 Marduk's resurrection of the astral deity may also reflect his role as a healer, Marduk-Asalluhi. An easily overlooked detail is the chain of command in this scene: The gods have instructed Marduk to kill and resurrect the star.

55 In the Sumerian epic, agency is complex. Innana gives instructions to her vizier before she embarks on her journey. When she dies, the vizier seeks help from Innana's father Enki, who then creates and instructs the ritual experts to rescue her. While there is a chain of executors, the initial decision lies with Innana. By arranging her resurrection in advance, Innana avoids being powerless in death.

56 A close reading of iv 24 and iv 26 shows that Marduk's command addresses a grammatically masculine entity (*lumāšu*, "star"). However, this does not mean that the deity's sex/gender is masculine. It could even be argued that the male form was chosen to make

verb *abātu* (“to destroy”) three times. It can be read as a powerful reminder of the death suffered by the female deity. Indeed, it would have made sense for the author of *Enūma elīš* to include an allusion to one of the most prominent narratives in ancient Mesopotamia, the myth of Innana’s descent, as it would have embedded their new story more deeply in the Mesopotamian tradition.

The variable in the Sequence of Hyleme Patterns 3a can now be replaced with Ištar’s name:

Hyleme Sequence 3b: MARDUK SENDS IŠTAR TO THE NETHERWORLD AND BRINGS HER BACK.

The assembled gods choose Ištar from among their midst.

The assembled gods call upon Marduk to “destroy” Ištar with his utterance.

The assembled gods call upon Marduk to resurrect Ištar with his utterance.

Marduk commands Ištar to descend into the netherworld.

Ištar descends into the netherworld.

Ištar dies.

Marduk revives Ištar by his command.

Marduk commands Ištar to rise from the netherworld.

Ištar rises from the netherworld.

Read in this way, *Enūma elīš* reframes and rephrases Innana’s descent, creating a new version of the old myth. This new version places Marduk in a position of superiority: the deity brings about Innana’s/Ištar’s death and resurrection. Accordingly, Innana/Ištar in this version does not enter the netherworld of her own accord, but is entirely at the mercy of the newly empowered divine king Marduk. Ištar is the first subject of Marduk’s kingship, the first deity to fall under his command.

5 Discussion

When considered together, the separate interpretations (see 2.–4.) contribute to a coherent overall picture; and this larger picture, as it is submitted, supports the individual findings. This mutual-reinforcement approach strengthens the argument for the presented interpretations.

the reference to Ištar more oblique, though this would be speculative. (What is more, Ištar is not exclusively female.)

Four thematic focal points that emerge from our findings bear further discussion. These, which are discussed below, are: the aspects of supra-divinity and divine sex/gender (5.1); the manner by which *Enūma eliš* deals with the traditional ritual means of enthronement and how they redefined this legacy (5.2); the manner by which the text resolves the conflicting competences of Ištar and Marduk, whether in the night sky (5.3) or in mastery of war (5.4).

5.1 *On Supra-divinity and Divine Sex/Gender*

As has been shown (see 3.2), Tiāmtu fulfils the role of Ištar in the sacred marriage procedure of Kingu's enthronement. Tiāmtu has a power that none of the gods possess, which places her in a different, higher category of being from the gods – in the same way that the goddess Ištar is in a separate category of being from her human husband. The distinction, or distance between human king and his divine queen is reasonably well defined, but for Tiāmtu I suggest the new category of supra-divinity. In the following, I will call these categories (human, divine, supra-divine) *ontic levels*. They will be helpful in describing power relations between individual characters in *Enūma eliš*.

Tiāmtu's supra-divine status is in line with the findings of Wisnom, who points out that Tiāmtu's role in *Enūma eliš* also shares elements with that of the mother goddess in the flood story (Wisnom 2019: 113).⁵⁷ In this myth, the mother goddess, who gave birth to the first humans, is horrified by their near extinction. She laments the divine king's decision to extinguish human life by sending a catastrophic flood. Her opposition is similar to Tiāmtu's opposition to Apsū's plan to exterminate the gods, her children. Again, Tiāmtu is placed on a higher ontic level above the deities in her care and their familial relationships (see Tab. 5).

TABLE 5 Indications of Tiāmtu's supra-divine nature

Context	Ontic level (relative)	<i>Enūma eliš</i>	Reference	Myth / concept
Saving the children	Higher	Tiāmtu	Mother goddess	Flood story
	Lower	Gods (= her children)	Humans (= her children)	
Enthronement	Higher	Tiāmtu	Ištar	Sacred marriage
	Lower	Kingu	<Human king>	

57 See also Harris 1993: 115; De Boer 2006: 143; Sonik 2009: 86; Gabriel 2014: 117 n. 35.

Reading Tiāmtu's category as supra-divine has consequences for our understanding of the roles of Kingu and Marduk in relation to her. In the concept of the sacred marriage, the human king takes on the role of the god Dumuzi. Like Dumuzi, who is mortal and remains mortal even as Innana's husband/consort, the human king remains a lesser being than the goddess, who is now his wife. The same pattern applies to Kingu: the sacred marriage does not change his ontic level; even as Tiāmtu's husband, Kingu remains a "mere" god. Even holding the Tablet of Destinies does not give him any additional, extraordinary powers (see also Gabriel 2014: 308).

The situation for Marduk is very different: when he ascends to the throne, his status changes dramatically. The gods of Anšar's faction, in elevating Marduk, surrender their own powers to the new king (ibid.: 375f.). The result is an accumulation of power in the new king, who now wields the combined, collective power of all his divine subjects. In absorbing the powers of his divine peers, Marduk surpasses them and has ascended to a higher ontic level: he has become a supra-divine being. As such, Marduk's power to decree fate (*šimtu*) surpasses Kingu's, whose ontic status has not changed as a consequence of his enthronement. In the confrontation between Kingu and Marduk, Kingu must fail. Their powers are unevenly matched, and his defeat comes as no surprise. Marduk's real, and equally powerful opponent is Tiāmtu, a supra-divine entity, like Marduk, who is inhabiting the same ontic level.

With the benefit of this in hindsight, it is clear that Ea's and Anu's earlier attempts to appease Tiāmtu were doomed to fail, just as Kingu's defeat in battle was a foregone conclusion. Ordinary gods are bound to fail against a supra-divine being. Both Ea and Anu must admit their powerlessness against Tiāmtu, but they note in their statement of concession:⁵⁸

II 92 //	<i>emūq sinništi lū dunnuna ul mala</i>	A woman's strength may be immense,
116	<i>ša zikri</i>	but not as great as a man's.

The idea is that if on the same ontic level, men defeat women, but if they exist on different levels, the higher level prevails. The implicit message the gods communicate is: We as gods must find or create a male supra-divine

⁵⁸ Transliteration is based on Heinrich 2021b.

being, since we as ordinary deities are powerless against her.⁵⁹ However, it is inevitable that this male supra-divine being would defeat Tiāmtu. Marduk, already a formidable fighter, volunteers for the mission, but being male alone is not enough. His ontic status demands elevation, and to that end he receives additional powers.

In *Enūma elīš*, both the ontic levels and the sex/gender of the main characters fundamentally define power relations between them. This suggests that the category of sex/gender has an essentialist, probably bodily, quality. It is therefore assumed that the author of the epic addressed the sex of the characters; questions of gender are not treated here. Accordingly, I will speak hereafter of sex, to reflect this focus of *Enūma elīš* (see also Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 15–7).⁶⁰

That sex (and gender) is not a crucial category *between* different ontic levels has already been observed with regard to the difference between human and divine, e.g. (Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 294):⁶¹

In general the character of goddesses transcends female/feminine even with those goddesses with strong biological or feminine traits; neither female biology nor feminine gender roles define a goddess. This is also visible in images where goddesses are rarely represented as sexualized beings or in roles obviously feminine. Like all Mesopotamian divinities, goddesses are transcendental beings with a secondary feminine aspect and even when emphasis shifted towards their roles as mother/birth goddess or spouse, they remained foremost divinities.

In her foundational article about gender as a “useful category of historical analysis,” Joan W. Scott defined it as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes (Scott 1986: 1067).” Whatever the ancient Mesopotamian perception of sex or gender may have been, any social or biological distinctions between men and women would have been nullified in the presence of differences of the ontic level. Humans are inferior to gods of either sex/gender, and the same principle applies to the divine and supra-divine levels in *Enūma elīš*. However, according to the understanding

59 Harris (2000: 81–3) offered a different interpretation for the reason why Anu and Ea fail. She attributed their defeat as a result of their old age. However, there is no indication in the text that this is actually the case (see also Sonik 2008: 742 n. 28).

60 Sonik 2009 speaks only of “gender” in her study of *Enūma elīš* without explaining her decision.

61 See also Zsolny 2009: 116.

of the text, when two characters are on the same ontic level, their sex determines the power relationship. Thus, Marduk necessarily wins over Tiāmtu because he both is supra-divine (same ontic status as Tiāmtu) and male (male defeats female). At the same time, Anu and Ea must fail, even though they are male, because the ontic difference is decisive.

Something of a conundrum in this context is the figure of Apsû: If one assumes that both Apsû and Tiāmtu are the very first beings, and that Apsû is the first head of the pantheon, then his status should have the same supra-divine quality as Tiāmtu's. But, if this is so, how is it possible for a lesser being, the god Ea, to kill him? A plot-driven explanation could be that Ea caught Apsû off guard. Another possible explanation focuses on the textual aspect and the descriptive terminology of the passage.

As previously discussed (3.2), Kingu is said to be Tiāmtu's *ḥā'iru*, a term frequently found in the Innana-Dumuzi tradition, in which it defines Dumuzi in relation to Innana. In their descriptions of the divine couple Apsû and Tiāmtu, the author of *Enūma elīš* used another lexeme from the same tradition: *ḥarmu* (Assante 1998: 13f.). Lambert (2013: 15) takes the next logical step and declares that the two terms are interchangeable; both signifying "lover, husband." By implication, then, Apsû's model of kingship is the same as Kingu's, and both are similar to Dumuzi's. In this reading, Apsû is king because he is Tiāmtu's husband; his rule is founded on the concept of his marriage to a superior being, the supra-divine Tiāmtu. Apsû's ontic level, therefore, is comparable to Kingu's. He is a lesser being,⁶² lower in the ontic hierarchy than supra-divine Tiāmtu.⁶³

5.2 *Competing Concepts of Enthronement*

The key question facing the author of *Enūma elīš* was how to legitimize a regime change in the Mesopotamian pantheon. In other words: how can a new divine king be installed? Traditionally, there had not been a change at the top of the divine hierarchy; Enlil had been the highest god for a very long time, and there had not been any need to legitimize his power. In order to make a case for change, a method would have to be found to justify such a transfer of power, ideally by legitimizing the new ruler and delegitimizing the

62 Apsû is not written with a divine classifier, possibly because the author of the epic did not consider him to be a god (in the strict sense; see Gabriel 2014, 118 n. 41). However, based on this discussion, I would generally place him on the same ontic level as the gods.

63 This reading would also account for the fact that Apsû consults Tiāmtu before proceeding with his plan to kill their children. Sonik 2009: 90 sees in this a sign of Tiāmtu's equal or superior status, and I would now point to her supra-divine status confirming Tiāmtu's superiority.

old one (Enlil) in the process. *Enūma elīš* provides the solution: with its patchwork of references to texts, mythical stories, and rituals the narrative situates itself within the ancient tradition while at the same time reshaping very specific elements of it. In this way, the author of *Enūma elīš* could be sure their new version of events would be fully embedded in the familiar tradition and become a part of it.⁶⁴

The main trajectory of the new narrative is Marduk's incremental rise to an absolutist form of kingship. As I have shown elsewhere (Gabriel 2014: 374–6; 2024: 191–3), the nature of Marduk's installation is in essence contractual: the gods enter into an agreement with their future king that defines their mutual responsibilities and obligations. Not only is this procedure remarkably similar to the Hobbesian idea of a contractarian legitimation of political power (id. 2014: 376–80; 2024: 192f.), it also responds to a similar challenge concerning the legitimate installation of a ruler without the invocation of a higher power that occupies a superior ontic level. In Hobbes' case the aim was to establish legitimacy without invoking the divine right of kings, in *Enūma elīš* the divine king must be established without the aid of a supra-divine being – even though the concept is present in the text, as this paper has shown (see 5.1). Why, then, does the author not make the case for a new ruler by citing the wishes of a higher authority (on a higher ontic level)? Why does the author introduce the novel idea of a contract between the king and his subjects?

We have seen that the sacred marriage was deemed appropriate for the purposes of Kingu's elevation. For Marduk, however, submission to a higher being was out of the question, as he intended to claim precisely that supreme position for himself. Not only would he be subordinate to a higher, supra-divine being, but it would be a *female* being wielding that power over him. Therefore, the sacred marriage and the enthronement through an Ištar-like figure could not serve as the foundation of Marduk's installation as king.

Since the sacred marriage had been the cornerstone of royal legitimacy in southern Mesopotamia for centuries, if not millennia, the epic's author could not simply ignore it.

Thus, they chose the sacred marriage as the means of enthronement for Kingu. Since he is unfit to be king, his enthronement discredits the sacred marriage as a procedure for installing a king and discredits the protagonist,

64 This is the usual way how innovation worked in ancient Mesopotamia (see, e.g., Maul 2015: 10).

Tiāmtu.⁶⁵ Although their marriage is not part of the narrative, Tiāmtu would also have been the source of Apsû's legitimacy (see 5.1), and he, too, proves to be incompetent. Like her second husband, Kingu, Tiāmtu's primordial husband Apsû exemplifies the fallibility of the system of kingship based on the sacred marriage.

The narrative of *Enūma eliš* is tied to the veneration of Innana/Ištar through the shared concept of a sacred marriage. This link now reflects poorly on the goddess Innana and the legitimacy she confers on her human partner (see 3.2). *Enūma eliš* demonstrates that the sacred marriage is no guarantee that the chosen candidate will be a competent ruler. In fact, it could be even said more strongly: for the epic the sacred marriage is a guarantee of producing an incompetent ruler. Tiāmtu's unsuccessful marriage to Kingu is the last of its kind in *Enūma eliš* – its failure demonstrates the failure of the concept. Tiāmtu is the last of her kind,⁶⁶ the last supra-divine being of the old order. Her death marks the death of the sacred marriage as a source of legitimacy in the divine (and human) realm.

While Tiāmtu is still alive, the gods of Anšar's party cannot use the model of the sacred marriage to install Marduk as their king; as the supra-divine source of legitimacy, she is their enemy, who must be defeated. Even a supra-divine ally would be problematic: Marduk would have to defer to their superior status, and this is not a viable option. The solution is a contractual agreement among two parties of equal (divine) status, Marduk and his (future) divine subjects.

Rather than a single deity selecting and installing a new king, the divine assembly completes the task. Although the divine assembly is an established political body in the mythical tradition, their role in installing a new divine king and the use of a contract between the prospective ruler and his subjects represent innovations. Thus, the author of *Enūma eliš* blended traditional and novel elements to establish Marduk's claim to the divine throne.

65 Furthermore, he is not of royal birth, but "raised from an otherwise undifferentiated mass of divine beings" (Sonik 2008: 742 n. 27), which further disqualifies him as well as it disqualifies the concept of the sacred marriage, which, according to the interpretation of *Enūma eliš*, has no regard for either lineage or qualification.

66 With no other supra-divine being left other than Marduk, the danger of another such being installing a rival king has also been eliminated.

5.3 *Competition in the Night Sky*

Another point of conflict between Ištar and Marduk is found in their heavenly aspects. Both deities are manifest through astral bodies: Jupiter embodies Marduk (also in *Enūma elīš*),⁶⁷ while Venus is Innana/Ištar (see also 4.2). Furthermore, the war goddess is represented by the constellation Bow (see also 2.2).

Ancient Mesopotamians distinguished between two groups of celestial bodies. The fixed stars and constellations were imagined as a herd of celestial animals whose paths in the sky followed a fixed course. The planets (including sun and moon), by contrast, could move as free agents (“wild sheep,” *bibbu*) without such constraints (e.g., Horowitz 1998: 152f.). Safely filed under separate categories, Innana’s/Ištar’s warrior manifestation in the constellation of the Bow would have posed no threat to Marduk’s ‘planetary’ supremacy. As the planet Venus, however, Innana/Ištar was still far brighter than Marduk-as-Jupiter.⁶⁸

Their celestial rivalry extended to astrological omens, with both Venus and Jupiter believed to be benefic planets. Mars and Saturn were portents of doom, while Mercury’s profile could vary (e.g., Hunger and Pingree 1999: 30; Rochberg 2007: 436). The appearance of Venus or Jupiter during a lunar eclipse could be a positive sign, a good omen predicting no ill effects from the eclipse (Wee 2014: 56f.).

Yet another area of celestial conflict arose from Marduk’s claim to rulership of the heavens (see also Pongratz-Leisten 2011: 158f.). Tablet v of *Enūma elīš* begins with the depiction of an all-powerful Marduk determining the movements of the fixed stars, planets, moon, and sun (see, e.g., Horowitz 1998: 114f.; Pongratz-Leisten 2011: 158f.; Lambert 2013: 182). Traditionally this had been the domain of Anu, Enlil, and Ea, who were responsible for the celestial order,⁶⁹ and are depicted in that role, for example, at the beginning of the astrological omen series *Enuma Anu Enlil* (see, e.g., Lambert 2013: 176). Similarly, Tablet xvi⁷⁰ of the Sumero-Akkadian exorcism series *Udug Hul* (xvi 23–26)⁷¹ contains the following passage:

67 Mercury is Ninurta’s planet. When Ninurta becomes an aspect of Marduk, Mercury can also become an astral manifestation of Marduk (Rochberg 2007: 436).

68 E.g., Rao 2012; “Even when Jupiter and Mars, the next brightest planets, are at their absolute brightest, they still can’t compete with Venus at its faintest” (Siegel 2021).

69 Anu, Enlil, and Ea each ruled over their own zone of the night sky. For Marduk’s displacement of Enlil in the celestial sphere, see Lambert 2013: 185.

70 Most likely, the last tablet is a later addition to the series (Wee 2014: 30), which would also explain the non-traditional grammar of the Sumerian text (see n. 73).

71 Transliteration based on Geller 2016: 506f. See also Wee 2014: 36f.

	Sumerian ⁷²	Akkadian
23	u ₄ -bi-a ^d en-lil ₂ -la ₂ dimma-bi ġeš bi ₂ -in-tuku-a enim ša ₃ -bi-še ₃ ba-an-gid ₂ -i	inūšu ^d enlil tēma šuātu išmē-ma amāta ana libbišu išdud
24	^d en-ki-da mas-su ₃ mah diġir-re-e-ne-ke ₄ ad ba-ni-ib ₂ -ge ₄ -ge ₄	itti ^d ea massē šēri ša ilānī imtallik-ma
25	^d nanna ^d utu ^d innana-ke ₄ ul-ġe ₂ -a si sa ₂ -e-de ₃ im-ma-ni-in-ġar	^d sîn ^d šamaš u ^d ištar šupuk šamê ana šutēšuri uktinnū
26	an-da nam-en-na kiš an-na-ke ₄ mu-un-de ₃ -ši-in-ġal-ġal-la	itti ^d anim bēlūt kiššat šamê izūssunūti
23	At that time Enlil heard this message (about the existence of the evil Seven), ⁷³ he took this word to (its =) his heart.	At that time Enlil heard this mes- sage (about the existence of the evil Seven), ⁷⁵ he took the word to his heart.
24	He consulted with Enki, the august expert of the gods.	He consulted with Ea, the august expert of the gods.
25	He/One placed Nanna, Utu, and Innana at the foundation of heaven (ul-ġe ₂) ⁷⁴ to regulate it.	Sîn, Shamash, and Ištar were made permanent in order to regulate the foundation of heaven.
26	Together with An, he distributed the lordship of all the heavens among them.	Together with Anu, he distributed the lordship of all the heavens among them.

72 The Sumerian of this passage deviates from the grammar of 'classical' Sumerian. For example, the /a/-Auslaut in ^den-lil₂-la (xvi 23) stands for the ergative /e/ (see also Attinger 1993: 214; Black and Zólyomi 2007: 19). Normally, the phrase ša₃+TERM-gid₂ (xvi 23) does not require a possessive suffix (e.g., Attinger 2021a: 411), its presence here suggests an Akkadian influence (and a confusion of animate and inanimate, since the text writes -bi- instead of -(a)ni-). The comitative -da (xvi 24) is attached to the first word of the phrase instead of taking an end position (another Akkadian influence; the term *massu mah*, "august expert", is a typical designation of Enki, e.g., *Bird and Fish* 3, *Damgalnuna A* 7', *Ur-Ninurta B* 2, indicating that it refers to him). The -ke₄ in diġir-re-e-ne-ke₄ (xvi 24), innana-ke₄ (xvi 25), and an-na-ke₄ (xvi 26) only marks the genitive (yet, it cannot be ruled out that the /e/ indicates a copula {=ak=ø-am₃} in xvi 25 and 26; see Wilcke 1998: 464; Black and Zólyomi 2007: 18). The Sumerian nominalizing /-a/ in xvi 23 correlates with the Akkadian enclitic -ma; a phenomenon I have observed on several occasions and which I believe deserves further investigation.

73 The evil Seven are manifested in the constellation of the Pleiades. For a comprehensive study of these demons, see Konstantopoulos 2023.

74 For the meaning of Sumerian ul-ġe₂ and its equivalency to Akkadian *šupuk šamê*, see Horowitz 1998: 239–41.

75 See n. 74.

In this Sumero-Akkadian account of how the celestial order came to be established, power is concentrated in the central figure of Enlil, while An and Enki/Ea play supporting roles. *Enūma elīš* is obviously closer to this narration than the example of *Enuma Anu Enlil*, which ranks them equally – and *Enūma elīš* goes even further by focusing solely on Marduk.⁷⁶

Another important aspect of this narrative is Ištar's "lordship of all the heavens" (**nam-en-na kiš an-na-ke₄** / *bēlūt kiššat šamê*, xvi 26), which she shares with the moon god (Nanna/Sin) and the sun god (Utu/Shamash). The narration makes it clear that, of course, they only possess this power at the behest of the divine king Enlil. However, this kind of transfer of authority is typical for myths in their function as "weltanschauliche Kampfplätze" (C. Zgoll 2019: 440). Two traditions are brought together, with one subduing the other. With this in mind, one can suppose that there was a tradition in which Ištar – possibly as part of a cluster with the sun and moon god – ruled the heavens. This concept is still preserved at least in part in the goddess' Sumerian name, Innana, which literally means "Lady of heaven" (***nin 'an-ak**). Myths, such as the one told by the exorcistic incantation *Udug hul*,⁷⁷ incorporate this tradition and subordinate it to the now dominant tradition of the divine lord, Enlil.

Enūma elīš, in its turn, replaces Enlil (and Anu and Ea) with Marduk, thus inheriting Enlil's power struggle with Ištar for control of the heavens. Marduk gains the upper hand and, with it, the power to command the movements of the stars and planets, including that of Innana/Ištar-as-Venus. When Marduk causes Ištar to travel through the netherworld in *Enūma elīš*, he determines her celestial course as a planet, and her fate as a deity. Marduk has established a new hierarchy, and Ištar falls under Marduk's command – even and especially in the night sky.

5.4 *Competing Gods of War*

Leaving their celestial rivalry to one side, Ištar and Marduk also went head-to-head as heroic deities and as gods of war. Lambert (e.g., 1986) and others have shown how Marduk absorbed key aspects of the Ninurta mythology, which transformed him into an invincible fighter against Tiāmtu and into the very idea of the divine hero par excellence. For Ištar, the battle against Mount Ebiḥ is among the best-known narratives showcasing her heroic side, while the

⁷⁶ See also Wee 2014: 56.

⁷⁷ A comprehensive discussion of the so-called "Lunar Eclipse Myth" in *Udug Hul* Tablet xvi is offered by Wee 2014, who argues that Ištar does not scheme to usurp the throne, as has been hypothesized, but rather is concerned for the kingship of heaven (ibid.: 43).

personal name ^dinnana-ur-saĝ (“Innana is a warrior/heroine”) is attested in various administrative texts of the third millennium BCE (CDLI 2024).

Beyond their individual fighting skills, both Innana/Ištar and Marduk were renowned as leaders of armies and bringers of victory. Two examples suffice to emphasize this quality. The goddess makes her spouse Ama-ušumgal-ana defeat the hostile lands in the Sumerian song *Innana E*.⁷⁸ A Sumerian hymn for the Old Babylonian king Samsu-iluna (*Samsu-iluna B*) states:⁷⁹

24	^d AMAR.UTU diĝir saĝ du ₃ -zu [g]u ₂ -en nun-e-ne-[k]a saĝ-zu he ₂ -eb ₂ -il ₂ -l[e]	Marduk, the god who <i>selected</i> ⁸⁰ you, may he lift your head among all princes.
25	ki me ₃ šen-šen ĝeš-ĝeš-l[a ₂ -a-k]a da-za ĝa ₂ -la na-an-ni-ib-dag-ge	At the places of battle, combat, and fight he will (literally: must) not leave your side.
26	a ₂ -taĥ ĝeš ^s tukul-zu he ₂ -[me] u ₄ su ₃ -ra ₂ -še ₃ he ₂ -ba'-e-di[rig-g]a [?]	May he be your brother-in-arms – until distant days – may he make you supersede (the enemy).

Since both songs date from the early second millennium (or earlier), we can posit with some confidence a long tradition of conflicting ideas about Marduk and Innana/Ištar as divine heroes and gods of war. The author of *Enūma eliš* had to resolve the conflict, which they did by turning Ištar into Marduk’s creation, his instrument, and eventually a *sign* of his overwhelming military prowess.

6 A Radical Reinterpretation: Synthesis

Ištar was one of the most prominent deities in ancient Mesopotamia and therefore impossible to ignore for the author of *Enūma eliš*, who were engaged in rewriting the traditional mythology for elevating Marduk to the new, absolutist

78 Edition: Falkenstein 1944: 105–13.
79 Transliteration based on Falkenstein 1949: 216.
80 Possibly, saĝ du₃ can be read here as a variant of saĝ du₃-du₃ which means something like “to consider one’s words” (Attinger 2002: 129; 2021a: 268). It would then describe that Marduk selected Samsu’iluna as king. Falkenstein (1949: 218) opts for the meaning “to create.”

divine king. A standard procedure for subduing deities was to absorb them and turn them into aspects of the new god (syncretism). However, not even a single female name is transferred to Marduk in *Enūma elīš*, not even a single goddess is co-opted by him.

For Ištar a different solution had to be found, one which turned out to be comprised of a combination of procedures, including the deity's anonymization, decomposition, and recontextualization in order to achieve delegitimization and subordination. Each of these five aspects is discussed in a separate section below. It will be shown how the goddess is radically redefined, both in the literal and in the metaphorical sense, as it touches upon the roots, the foundational aspects of the goddess, i.e., her legitimizing power through the sacred marriage, her journey into the netherworld which gave her the power over life and death, and finally the strong military aspect of the goddess as a heroine and goddess of war.

It looks like *Enūma elīš* thus reflects a general trend in mythical narratives in ancient Mesopotamia from the third to the first millennium BCE that sees goddesses ousted from their original positions of power, to be replaced by male deities (see, e.g., Frymer-Kensky 1992: 70–80; Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013; C. Zgoll 2019: 487–90; Steinkeller 2021).⁸¹

6.1 Anonymization

The author withholds Ištar's name completely, thus hiding the goddess from the reader. To conceal the name of a person, and worse, of a god, is the most aggressive attack possible in ancient Mesopotamia. *Damnatio memoriae* is the ultima ratio of this highly traditional culture (see also C. Zgoll 2019: 496–500). Enlil's name is mentioned a number of times in *Enūma elīš* even though he is Marduk's main opponent, the divine king who is overthrown by the epic's story. To borrow from the title of Wisnom's study (2019), *Weapons of Words*, the omission of words (here: names) is the sharpest weapon of all.

In the case of deities, the effect of anonymization may be particularly powerful, because a deity's name brackets the godhead's many aspects and layers,

81 I think it is no coincidence that the narrative texts that marginalize the role of female deities are songs dedicated to male gods, e.g., *Enki and Ninmah* is a song of praise to Enki, *Enlil and Sud* and the *Epic of Atra-ḥasis* extol Enlil, and *Enūma elīš* glorifies Marduk. It would locate this trend in the priesthood assigned to male gods; gods who might compete with goddesses. As a result, the priests would attack the female opponents by marginalizing them in the stories they tell about their masters. It would also explain the male-centric pattern we observe in the narratives, while female deities retain essential functions in the culture as a whole (Frymer-Kensky 1992: 75f.; Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 287).

creating the idea of one distinct and powerful entity. Withholding Ištar's name removes this link, weakening the idea of a single powerful goddess.

6.2 *Decomposition*

The loss of the unifying name goes hand in hand with the splitting of the deity into their constituent parts: Ištar's legitimizing power in the sacred marriage, Ištar's famous descent into the netherworld, and Ištar's martial power as a heroine and goddess of war become separated. Each aspect is then treated individually, i.e. placed in a new context and given a new meaning (see 6.3).

6.3 *Recontextualization*

Innana's/Ištar's three core aspects (the powers of legitimization, life and death, and war) are broken up and newly defined. The principle of the sacred marriage is transferred from the human to the divine sphere, where Tiāmtu replaces Ištar as the source of legitimacy. With not one but two incompetent spouses, Apsû and Kingu, to account for, Tiāmtu's judgement is called into question, and the poor choices she made exemplify⁸² the ineffectiveness of the procedure, ultimately emphasizing that it is worthless.

Originally, Innana's/Ištar's descent was a heroic act by which she acquired not only the fertile powers of the netherworld for humanity, but also the power over life and death. The empowering message is turned on its head when Ištar is sent to her death by Marduk, who then brings her back to life at a mere whim. In the original story, Innana/Ištar went from being a patient of the power of death to an agent of that same power. In *Enūma elīš*, she is made passive, while Marduk is characterized as the master of life and death, even that of the gods.

Ištar in her warrior aspect is dismantled in the passage about Marduk's bow. Ištar the warrior (as she appears, for instance, in the Sumerian text *Innana and Ebiḫ*) still shines through in the section in which Marduk uses her (the bow) to defeat Tiāmtu. Ištar-as-bow sends the arrow that kills Tiāmtu, but it is Marduk who has fashioned the bow for himself, he is the sole source and possessor of all agency. Ištar is merely a tool at his command (see 6.5).

6.4 *Delegitimization*

Enūma elīš establishes an argument in favor of Marduk's undisputed claim to the divine throne (see 1.2). It was the task of *Enūma elīš* to address and discredit the traditional forms of royal legitimization, summarized in the modern term of the *sacred marriage*. This method of legitimizing a king, human or

82 For a brief discussion of the pivotal Mesopotamian epistemic approach of exemplification, see Gabriel 2018b: 181–4.

divine, represented a threat to Marduk, as it required a supra-divine female entity to legitimize his rule, and his kingship would ultimately depend on her goodwill – an unacceptable proposition that had to be delegitimized and discredited (see 5.2). Discrediting the procedure was a matter of projection: endowed with Ištar's qualities, Tiāmtu would be the legitimizing supra-divinity that Ištar was, an Ištar-in-all-but-name. Her chosen spouses Apsû and Kingu, by becoming her (consecutive) husbands, become kings. Both turn out to be incompetent, discrediting the procedure and the entity responsible for it, Tiāmtu-as-Ištar. *Enūma elīš* destroys the principle of the sacred marriage and removes Ištar from the 'business' of royal legitimization altogether. The tradition of the sacred marriage literally dies when Marduk kills Tiāmtu.

Tiāmtu's rage, the rage of the primordial mother, can now be decoded as an echo of Ištar the warrior goddess (see already Sonik 2009: 92). Ištar's wrath is a facet of her generally positive use of force for the benefit of humanity (see 6.5),⁸³ which is now devalued in the figure of Tiāmtu. Tiāmtu's unstoppable drive to avenge her husband's death and to destroy the gods of Anšar's party is a far cry from Ištar's higher goals. Tiāmtu's anger is merely destructive, devoid of its original meaning for the proper functioning of the cosmos (see, e.g., Frymer-Kensky 1992: 66–9; Gabriel 2022: 421).

6.5 Subordination

A close reading of *Enūma elīš* reveals that Ištar, though nameless, is still present in the narrative. Invisible though she may be throughout the text, the goddess continues to shine brightly in the night sky (both as the planet Venus and as the constellation of the Bow); she is Anu's "daughter" (*mārtu* VI 87), and the other gods are her "companions" (*athû* VI 91). However, she has been deprived of all agency – while Marduk is steadily on the rise, absorbing the energy, and agency that is draining away from the goddess.

The famous Sumerian epic of the descent of Innana/Ištar (*angalta*) begins by stating that the goddess directed her mind to the netherworld, carefully planned the dangerous undertaking, and then carried it out (e.g., A. Zgoll 2020: 106f.). Innana/Ištar clearly initiates the action and remains the agent of her

83 Her power is not all positive. Many traditional texts portray Ištar/Innana's anger as having the potential of destabilizing effect on the world order, and as an existential threat to all. Examples include Sumerian songs such as *Inninshagura* (= *Innana C*; Edition: Sjöberg 1975) and *Fashioning the Lamentation Priest* (gala; Edition: Kramer 1981), as well as Akkadian songs such as *Agushaya* (editions by, e.g., Groneberg 1997b: 73–93; Pohl 2022: 124–75).

own destiny on the way into and out of the netherworld. In *Enūma elīš*, her agency has been transferred to Marduk who, as the *authoritative agent*, is now in charge and commands her to descend into the netherworld.⁸⁴

The original myth sees Innana/Ištar descending into the netherworld of her own free will, to acquire its powers, including control over life and death. In contrast, in *Enūma elīš*: By sending Ištar to the netherworld, Marduk proves quite casually that he already possesses the very thing Innana still sought to obtain in the older myth: the power over life and death.⁸⁵

When Marduk uses Ištar, the Bow, to kill Tiāmtu, he also kills the power of the goddess to legitimize the royal succession through the ritual of the sacred marriage, which has become an aspect of Tiāmtu in *Enūma elīš*. The defeat of Tiāmtu is nothing less than another form of subordination for Ištar.

Finally, Marduk absorbs Ištar's military competence in three steps:

- Ištar, the Bow, is Marduk's creation: Ištar only exists because of Marduk. Ištar's military capability depends entirely on Marduk's ingenious design of the bow.
- Ištar, the Bow, is Marduk's tool: She fights against Tiāmtu (= a part of herself), but is only the executing, secondary agent. The primary, authoritative agent is Marduk, who holds the bow in his hands and shoots the arrow.
- Ištar, the Star Bow, is a celestial sign proclaiming Marduk's military competence: Ištar's nocturnal visibility does not advertise her own divine greatness but that of Marduk, in particular his military aspect (symbolized both by the bow and by the warlike Ištar of Elam).

By the end of this trilogy of subordination, every aspect of Ištar as a goddess of war has become an aspect of Marduk and/or a reference to his superiority.

Without ever mentioning Ištar by name, the story of *Enūma elīš* has fully accomplished what it set out to do: Ištar has been rendered speechless, powerless, and, as far as the text is concerned, invisible. The story has, in modern military parlance, "neutralized" the goddess.

84 More precisely, the assembled gods give the order for Marduk to order Ištar's descent into the netherworld. The chain of command and the underlying hierarchy identify Ištar's descent as an element of Marduk's enthronement: the gods are in command because only the gods can lay down the sequence of events for this divine ritual.

85 It is only through indirect implications that we glean the full extent of Marduk's powers, and that they include the power over the netherworld. The netherworld is another part of the Mesopotamian tradition that only appears mostly indirectly in the text of *Enūma elīš* (e.g., Horowitz 1998: 125; Seri 2012: 26; Gabriel 2014: 294f. n. 209).

References

- Asher-Greve, J. M. 1985. *Frauen in altnesopotamischer Zeit*. BiMes 18. Malibu.
- Asher-Greve, J. M., and J. G. Westenholz. 2013. *Goddesses in Context: On Divine Powers, Roles, Relationships and Gender in Mesopotamian Textual and Visual Sources*. OBO 259. Fribourg and Göttingen.
- Assante, J. 1998. "The kar.kid/ħarimtu, Prostitute or Single Woman? A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *UF* 30: 5–96.
- Attinger, P. 1993. *Eléments de linguistique sumérienne: La construction de du₁₁/e/di « dire »*. Fribourg and Göttingen.
- Attinger, P. 1998. "Inana et Ebiġ," *ZA* 88: 164–95.
- Attinger, P. 2002. Review of *Ur III Period (2112–2004 BC)* (RIME 3/2), by D. Frayne, *ZA* 92: 124–31.
- Attinger, P. 2019. "La descente d'Innana dans le monde infernal (1.4.1)," <https://zenodo.org/record/2599619>, retrieved August 28, 2023.
- Attinger, P. 2021a. *Glossaire sumérien-français principalement des textes littéraires paléobabyloniens*. Wiesbaden.
- Attinger, P. 2021b. "Innana et Ebiġ (1.3.2)," <https://zenodo.org/records/4741169>, retrieved March 19, 2024.
- Bartash, V. 2010. "Puġru: Assembly as a Political Institution in *Enūma eliš* (Preliminary Study)," in *Language in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 53^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, ed. S. Loesov et al. Babel & Bibel 4. Winona Lake, 1083–8.
- Black, J., and G. Zólyomi. 2007. "Introduction to the Study of Sumerian," in *Analyzing Literary Sumerian: Corpus-Based Approaches*, ed. J. Ebeling and G. Cunningham. London, 1–32.
- Borger, R. 2004. *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*. AOAT 305. Münster.
- CDLI. 2024. "inanna-ur-sag," <https://cdli.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/search?simple-value%5B%5D=inanna-ur-sag&simple-field%5B%5D=keyword>, retrieved April 5, 2024.
- Cohen, M. E. 1993. *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East*. Bethesda.
- Cooper, J. S. 1986. *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions*, Vol. 1: *Presargonic Inscriptions*. AOS TS 1. New Haven.
- Cooley, J. L. 2013. *Poetic Astronomy in the Ancient Near East: The Reflexes of Celestial Science in Ancient Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, and Israelite Narrative*. HACL 5. Winona Lake.
- Cuperly, B. 2021. *Betrayal, Regrets, Flies, and Demons: Philological and Historical Analysis of Dumuzi's Catabasis in the Sumerian Epic Innana's Descent to the Netherworld*. PhD diss., Georg-August-Universität Göttingen.
- Dalley, S. 2000. *Myths from Mesopotamia. Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Rev. ed. Oxford.

- De Boer, R. 2006. "An Un-Original Tale: Utopia Denied in Enuma Elish. (Part 11: The Politics of Utopia) (Critical Essay)," *Arena Journal* 26: 136–60.
- Debourse, C. 2022. *Of Priests and Kings: The Babylonian New Year Festival in the Last Age of Cuneiform Culture*. CHANE 127. Leiden.
- Douven, I. 2021. "Abduction," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), edited by E. N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/abduction/>, retrieved June 4, 2025.
- eBL 2020. "K.7992," <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.7992>, retrieved April 4, 2024.
- Fadhil, A. A., and E. Jiménez. 2022. "Literary Texts from the Sippar Library III: 'Eriš šummi', a Syncretistic Hymn to Marduk," *ZA* 112: 229–74.
- Fadhil, A. A., and E. Jiménez. 2023. "Literary Texts from the Sippar Library IV: A "Macranthropic" Hymn to Ninurta," *ZA* 113: 193–222.
- Falkenstein, A. 1944. "Untersuchungen zur sumerischen Grammatik (Fortsetzung)," *ZA* 48: 69–118.
- Falkenstein, A. 1949. "Ein sumerisches Kultlied auf Samsu'iluna," *ArOr* 17: 212–26.
- Farber, W. 1977. *Beschwörungrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi*. VOM 30. Wiesbaden.
- Foucault, M. 1969. "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 63: 73–104.
- Foster, B. R. 2005. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. 3rd ed. Bethesda.
- Frymer-Kensky, T. 1992. *In the Wake of the Goddess: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth*. New York.
- Gabriel, G. 2014. *Enūma eliš – Weg zu einer globalen Weltordnung: Pragmatik, Struktur und Semantik des babylonischen 'Lieds auf Marduk'*. ORA 12. Tübingen.
- Gabriel, G. 2018a. "Decreeing Fate and Name-giving in Enūma eliš: Approaching a Fundamental Mesopotamian Concept with Special Consideration of the Underlying Assumptions and of the Condition of Possibility of Human Knowledge," in *Text and Image, Proceedings of the 61^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, ed. P. Attinger et al. OBO, SA 40. Leuven, 163–78.
- Gabriel, G. 2018b. "An Exemplificational Critique of Violence: Re-reading the Old Babylonian Epic *Inūma ilū awīlum* (a.k.a. Epic of Atramḫasis)," *JANEH* 5: 179–213.
- Gabriel, G. 2021a. Review of *Weapons of Words: Intertextual Competition in Babylonian Poetry: A Study of Anzū, Enūma Eliš, and Erra and Išum* by S. Wisnom. *ZA* 111: 136–42.
- Gabriel, G. 2022. "Emotions and Ritual Laments: The Affective Function of Beer in Mesopotamia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Emotions in the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. Sonik and U. Steinert. Milton Park, 413–24.
- Gabriel, G. 2024. "Marduk's Elevation: A Masterpiece of Political Thought," in *Enuma Elish – The Babylonian Epic of Creation*, ed. J. Haubold et al. LBL 1. London, 181–97.

- Geller, M. 2016. *Healing Magic and Evil Demons: Canonical Uduḡ-hul Incantations*. BAM 8. Boston.
- Groneberg, B. 1997a. "Ein Ritual an Ištar," *MARI* 8: 291–303.
- Groneberg, B. 1997b. *Lob der Ištar: Gebet und Ritual an die altbabylonische Venusgöttin*. CM 8. Groningen.
- Hallo, W. W. 1957. *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles: A Philologic and Historical Analysis*. AOS 43. New Haven.
- Harris, R. 1993. "Gendered Old Age in Enuma Elish," in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. M. E. Cohen et al. Bethesda, 111–5.
- Harris, R. 2000. *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The Gilgamesh Epic and Other Ancient Literature*. Norman.
- Haul, M. 2000. *Das Etana-Epos: Ein Mythos von der Himmelfahrt des Königs von Kiš*. GAAL 1. Göttingen.
- Heinrich, A. C. 2021a. "Poem of Creation (Enūma eliš) Chapter I. With contributions by Z. J. Földi and E. Jiménez. Translated by Anmar A. Fadhil and Benjamin R. Foster," electronic Babylonian Library. <https://doi.org/10.5282/eb1/1/1/2>, retrieved August 8, 2023.
- Heinrich, A. C. 2021b. "Poem of Creation (Enūma eliš) Chapter II. With contributions by Z. J. Földi, E. Jiménez and T. D. N. Mitto. Translated by Benjamin R. Foster," electronic Babylonian Library. <https://doi.org/10.5282/eb1/1/1/2>, last access on August 8, 2023.
- Heinrich, A. C. 2021c. "Poem of Creation (Enūma eliš) Chapter IV. With contributions by Z. J. Földi, A. Häntinen, E. Jiménez and T. D. N. Mitto. Translated by Benjamin R. Foster," electronic Babylonian Library. <https://doi.org/10.5282/eb1/1/1/2>, retrieved August 8, 2023.
- Heinrich, A. C. 2021d. "Poem of Creation (Enūma eliš) Chapter VI. With contributions by Z. J. Földi, A. Häntinen, E. Jiménez and T. D. N. Mitto. Translated by Benjamin R. Foster," electronic Babylonian Library. <https://doi.org/10.5282/eb1/1/1/2>, retrieved March 21, 2024.
- Heinrich, A. C. 2021e. "Poem of Creation (Enūma eliš) Chapter VII. With contributions by Z. J. Földi, E. Jiménez and T. D. N. Mitto." Translated by Anmar A. Fadhil and Benjamin R. Foster, electronic Babylonian Library. <https://doi.org/10.5282/eb1/1/1/2>, retrieved August 28, 2023.
- Horowitz, W. 1998. *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*. MC 8. Winona Lake.
- Horowitz, W. 2014. *The Three Stars Each: The Astrolabes and Related Texts*. AFO Beih 33. Vienna.
- Hunger, H., and D. Pingree. 1999. *Astral Sciences in Mesopotamia*. HdO 44. Leiden.
- Izre'el, S. 1993. "New Readings in the Amarna Versions of Adapa and Nergal and Ereskigal," in *Kinattūtu ša darāti: Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume*, ed. A. F. Rainey. Tel Aviv, 51–67.

- Kämmerer, T. R., and K. A. Metzler. 2012. *Das babylonische Welterschöpfungsepos Enūma eliš*. AOAT 375. Münster.
- Karahashi, F. 2004. "Fighting the Mountain: Some Observations on the Sumerian Myths of Inanna and Ninurta," *JNEA* 63: 111–8.
- Kolev, R. K. 2013. *The Babylonian Astrolabe: The Calendar of Creation*. SAAS 22. Helsinki.
- Konstantopoulos, G. 2023. *The Divine/Demonic Seven and the Place of Demons in Mesopotamia*. AMD 20. Leiden.
- Kramer, S. N. 1981. "BM 29616: The Fashioning of the Gala," *ASJ* 3: 1–11.
- Lambert, W. G. 1986. "Ninurta Mythology in the Babylonian Epic of Creation," in *Keilschriftliche Literaturen: Ausgewählte Beiträge der xxxii. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, ed. K. Hecker and W. Sommerfeld. Berlin, 55–60.
- Lambert, W. G. 2003–2004. "A Syncretistic Hymn to Ištar," *AfO* 50: 21–7.
- Lambert, W. G. 2013. *Babylonian Creation Myths*. MC 16. Winona Lake.
- Marchesi, G. 2015. "Toward a Chronology of Early Dynastic Rulers in Mesopotamia," in *History & Philology*, ed. W. Sallaberger and I. Schrakamp. ARCANÉ 3. Turnhout, 139–56.
- Marchesi, G., and N. Marchetti. 2011. *Royal Statuary of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia*. MC 14. Winona Lake.
- Maul, S. M. 2015. "Rückwärts schauend in die Zukunft: Utopien des Alten Orients," in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 57th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Rome, 4–8 July 2011*, ed. A. Archi. Winona Lake, 3–12.
- Mayer, W. R. 2005. "Das Gebet des Eingeweideschauers an Ninurta," *Or* 74: 51–6.
- Oelsner, J., and W. Horowitz. 1997–1998. "The 30-Star-Catalogue HS 1897 and The Late Parallel BM 55502," *AfO* 44–5: 176–85.
- Ossendrijver, M. 2020. "Techniques of Measurement and Computation," *Hellenistic Astronomy: The Science in Its Context*, ed. A. C. Bowen and F. Rochberg. Leiden, 41–53.
- Pohl, A. 2022. *Die akkadischen Hymnen der altbabylonischen Zeit: Grammatik, Stilistik, Editionen*. LAS 13. Wiesbaden.
- Pomponio, F. 1994. "Re di Uruk, 're di Kiš,'" *RSO* 68: 1–14.
- Ponchia, S., and M. Luukko. 2013. *The Standard Babylonian Myth of Nergal and Ereškigal: Introduction, Cuneiform Text and Transliteration with a Translation, Glossary and Commentary*. SAACT 8. Helsinki.
- Pongratz-Leisten, B. 2011. "Divine Agency and the Astralization of Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. B. Pongratz-Leisten. Winona Lake, 137–87.
- Rao, J. 2012. "Venus and Jupiter Align: 3 Odd Facts About 2-Planet Tango," <https://www.space.com/14852-venus-jupiter-alignment-facts.html>, retrieved September 19, 2023.

- Reiner, E. 1998. "Celestial Omen Tablets and Fragments in the British Museum," in *Tikip santakki mala bašmu: Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994*, ed. S. M. Maul. CM 10. Groningen, 215–302.
- Reiner, E., and D. Pingree. 1981. *Babylonian Planetary Omens, Part Two: Enūma Anu Enlil 50–51*. BM 2/2. Malibu.
- Rochberg, F. 2007. "Marduk in Heaven," *WZKM* 97: 433–42.
- Rochberg, F. 2010. *In the Path of the Moon: Babylonian Celestial Divination and Its Legacy*. AMD 6. Leiden.
- Rochberg, F. 2011. "The Heavens and the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia: The View from a Polytheistic Cosmology," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. B. Pongratz-Leisten. Winona Lake, 117–36.
- Rochberg, F. 2021. "Mereological Themes in Cuneiform Worldmaking," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 46, 386–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03080188.2020.1832352>, retrieved May 21, 2025.
- Schaudig, H. 2012. "Death of Statues and Rebirth of Gods," in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. N. N. May. OIS 8. Chicago, 123–49.
- Scott, J. W. 1986. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *AHR* 91/5: 1053–75.
- Sefati, Y. 1998. *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature: Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs*. Ramat Gan.
- Seminara, S. 2001. *La versione accadica del Lugal-e: La tecnica babilonese della traduzione dal sumerico e le sue regole*. MVSum 8. Rome.
- Seri, A. 2012. "The Role of Creation in Enūma eliš," *JANER* 12: 4–29.
- Siegel, E. 2021. "This Is Why Venus Is The Brightest, Most Extreme Planet We Can See," <https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2021/07/14/this-is-why-venus-is-the-brightest-most-extreme-planet-we-can-see/>, retrieved September 19, 2023.
- Sjöberg, Å. W. 1975. "in-nin šà-gur4-ra: A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna by the en-Priestess Enheduanna," *ZA* 65: 161–253.
- Sonik, K. 2008. "Bad King, False King, True King: Apsû and His Heirs," *JAOS* 128: 737–43.
- Sonik, K. 2009. "Gender Matters in Enuma Elish," in *In the Wake of Tikva Frymer-Kensky*, ed. S. Holloway et al. Piscataway, 85–101.
- Steinkeller, P. 2013. "How Did Šulgi and Išbi-Erra Ascend to Heaven?" in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist*, ed. D. S. Vanderhooft and A. Winitzer. Winona Lake, 459–78.
- Steinkeller, P. "Early Mesopotamian Divine System: Some Fundamental Concerns," *AfO* 54: 255–66.
- Stol, M. 2016. *Women in the Ancient Near East*. Boston.
- Szarzyńska, K. 1987. "The Sumerian Goddess INANA-KUR," *orientalia Varsoviensia*: 7–14.
- Talon, P. 2005. *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enūma eliš: Introduction, Cuneiform Text, Transliteration, and Sign List with a Translation and Glossary in French*. SAACT 4. Helsinki.

- Thavapalan, S. 2020. "Stones from the Mountain, Stones from the Kiln: Colour in the Glass Texts from Ancient Mesopotamia," in *The Value of Colour: Material and Economic Aspects in the Ancient World*, ed. S. Thavapalan and D. A. Warburton. BSAW 70. Berlin, 177–200.
- Van Dijk, J. 1983. *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL: Le récit épique et didactique des Travaux de Ninurta, du Déluge et de la Nouvelle Création*. Leiden.
- Vanstiphout, H. 1992. "Enuma Elish as a Systematic Creed: An Essay," *OLP* 23: 37–61.
- von Weiher, E. 1988. *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk, Teil III*. ADFU 12. Berlin.
- Walker, C. 1983. "The Myth of Girra and Elamatum," *AS* 33: 145–52.
- Wee, J. Z. 2014. "Grieving with the Moon: Pantheon and Politics in The Lunar Eclipse," *JANER* 14: 29–67.
- Wee, J. Z. 2016. "A Late Babylonian Astral Commentary on Marduk's Address to the Demons," *JNES* 75: 127–67.
- Wilcke, C. 1976–1980. "Inanna/Ištar (Mesopotamien). A. Philologisch," *RLA* 5: 74–87.
- Wilcke, C. 1998. "Zu 'Gilgameš und Akka': Überlegungen zur Zeit von Entstehung und Niederschrift, wie auch zum Text des Epos mit einem Exkurs zur Überlieferung von 'Šulgi A' und von 'Lugalbanda,'" in *Dubsar anta-men: Studien zur Altorientalistik: Festschrift für Willem H. Ph. Römer zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres, mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz. AOAT 253. Münster, 457–86.
- Wilcke, C. 2007. "Das Recht: Grundlage des sozialen und politischen Diskurses im Alten Orient," in *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient*, ed. C. Wilcke. Wiesbaden, 209–44.
- Wisnom, S. 2019. *Weapons of Words: Intertextual Competition in Babylonian Poetry: A study of Anzû, Enûma Eliš, and Erra and Išum*. CHANE 106. Leiden.
- Zgoll, A. 1997. "Inana als nugig," *ZA* 87: 181–95.
- Zgoll, A. 2006. "Königslauf und Götterrat: Struktur und Deutung des babylonischen Neujahrsfestes," in *Festtraditionen in Israel und im Alten Orient*, ed. E. Blum and R. Lux. VWGTh 28. Gütersloh. 11–80.
- Zgoll, A. 2019. "Mythos als rituell aufgeführtes Drama: Inthronisation, Tempelschöpfung und Stadtgründung im altbabylonischen Lied auf Bazi," in *De l'argile au numérique: Mélanges assyriologiques en l'honneur de Dominique Charpin*, ed. G. Chambon et al. PIPOAC 3. Leuven, 1209–42.
- Zgoll, A. 2020. "Durch Tod zur Macht, selbst über den Tod. Mythische Strata von Unterweltsgang und Auferstehung der Innana/Ištar in sumerischen und akkadischen Quellen," in *Mythische Sphärenwechsel: Methodisch neue Zugänge zu antiken Mythen in Orient und Okzident* (Mythological Studies 2), ed. A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll. Berlin, 83–159.
- Zgoll, A., and K. Lämmerhirt. 2009–2011. "Schicksal (-stafel, -sbestimmung). A. In Mesopotamien," *RLA* 12: 145–55.

- Zgoll, A., and C. Zgoll. 2020a. "Condensation of Myths: A Hermeneutic Key to a Myth about Innana and the Instruments of Power (me), Incorporated in the Epic Angalta," in *Dealing with Antiquity – Past, Present, and Future, Proceedings of the 63^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Marburg 2017*, ed. W. Sommerfeld. AOAT 460. Münster, 427–47.
- Zgoll, A., and C. Zgoll. 2020b. "Innana-Ištar's Durchgang durch das Totenreich in Dichtung und Kult: Durch Hylemanalysen zur Erschließung von Spuren mythischer Stoffvarianten in kultischer Praxis und epischer Verdichtung," in *The Third Millennium: Studies in Early Mesopotamia and Syria in Honor of Walter Sommerfeld and Manfred Krebernik*, ed. I. Arkhipov et al. Leiden, 752–802.
- Zgoll, A., and C. Zgoll. 2021. "Lugalbanda's Königtum und das Feuer des Prometheus: Merkmale, Funktionen und Interpretationen von Mythen über eine Herkunft im Himmel," in *Was vom Himmel kommt: Stoffanalytische Zugänge zu antiken Mythen aus Mesopotamien, Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom*, ed. G. Gabriel et al. MythoS 4. Berlin, 571–607.
- Zgoll, C. 2019. *Tractatus mythologicus Theorie und Methodik zur Erforschung von Mythen als Grundlegung einer allgemeinen, transmedialen und komparatistischen Stoffwissenschaft*. MythoS 1. Berlin.
- Zgoll, C. 2020. "Myths as Polymorphous and Polystratic Erzählstoffe: A Theoretical and Methodological Foundation," in *Mythische Sphärenwechsel: Methodisch neue Zugänge zu antiken Mythen in Orient und Okzident*, ed. A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll. MythoS 2. Berlin, 9–82.
- Zgoll, C. 2021. "Grundlagen der hylistischen Mythosforschung," in *Was vom Himmel kommt: Stoffanalytische Zugänge zu antiken Mythen aus Mesopotamien, Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom*, ed. G. Gabriel et al. MythoS 4. Berlin, 11–52.
- Zsolnay, I. 2009. "Do Divine Structures of Gender Mirror Mortal Structures of Gender?," in *In the Wake of Tikva Frymer-Kensky*, ed. S. Holloway et al. Piscataway, 103–20.