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Mesopotamian Mythology I

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The following notes deal with the epical literature in cuneiform and are meant to prepare, in many respects, a reconsideration and even a reinterpretation of certain crucial and obscure passages. They are based upon a definitely personal approach which attempts to combine literary criticism with philological detail-research.

The notes are divided into three sections: I) *Enûma Eliš*, the Epic of Creation; II) the Epic of Gilgamesh; III) the balance of the pertinent Akkadian literature. Each note is numbered and reference will be made to these numbers throughout the study. The Epic of Creation is quoted according to the edition of Labat (R. Labat, *Le poème babylonien de la création*, Paris 1935) ⁽¹⁾; the Epic of Gilgamesh according to R. C. Thompson's monumental work. The editions used for the other texts will be indicated.

1 — En. El. I:1-9.

The flow of the initial verses of the poem is interrupted by line 6. "The shrubs (in the marshes) were not (yet) densely grown together, even the canebrakes were not (yet) visible". We have to omit this verse as a clumsy addition of a redactor who inserted here a line taken from the well-known type of Sumerian "Myths of Origin" in which the *primaeva* chaos is wordily described. Thus the poem runs as follows:

- 1 Before, above, heaven existed (and),
- 2 below, earth came into being

⁽¹⁾ The most recent English translation of this text, A. Heidel's *The Babylonian Genesis, The Story of the Creation*, Chicago 1942, has been utilized only as far as it contains new interpretations, novel emendations, etc. The translations offered by Heidel are not discussed in these notes.

3 (then) primaeval Apsu – the (future) begetter of them (*i. e.* the
[gods])
4 and the original mother Tiamat – who was to give birth to all of them –
5 mingled⁽¹⁾ their waters together so that,
7 before any (other) god had appeared,
8 was given a name or assigned a duty⁽²⁾,
9 the (following) divine beings were created in between them (*i. e.*
[Apsu and Tiamat]).

The distich 7 and 8 seems to have been interpolated by a theological minded editor alluding here to the division within the world of the gods, between those born or otherwise brought into existence (*cf.* no. 2) by Tiamat, and those who were to be the offspring of the couple Anšar and Kišar.

2 — En. El. I:10-16.

Against the *communis opinio* I am inclined to contend that two sets of divine twins were the outcome of the above mentioned union of Apsu and Tiamat. I do not consider Anšar and Kišar as the generation following Laḫmu and Laḫamu, but as that borne by Tiamat after the first couple proved to be a failure. The first twins were not anthropomorphic in appearance⁽³⁾ and lacked, above all, the faculty of procreation. This clearly follows from the description of the next generation (Anšar and Kišar) which the text expressly characterizes as *eli-šu-nu at-ru* “more highly developed than they”. The poet repeatedly stresses the fact that the gods Anšar, Kišar, Anu and Nudimmud belong to the same evolutionary level, by using such terms as *šaninu* “equal”, *tamšilu* “replica” and *muššulu* “to create a likeness”, in contradistinction to *banû* IV “to be born”, *wapû* III “to make come forth”, which refer to the birth of the direct offspring of Tiamat.

⁽¹⁾ With *ḫēqu* “to mix (liquids or grains)” (*cf. e. g.* Dhorme RA VIII p. 49:9, Thureau-Dangin, *Rit. Acc.* p. 140:352) and “to cont(r)act”, the poem refers here probably to the concept of an originally lasting sexual union between the male and the female constituents of the primaeval world which only the new-born Light-god interrupts.

⁽²⁾ For the various meanings of the idiomatic expression *šmtu šamu* *cf.* note 1, p. 222.

⁽³⁾ *Cf. e. g.* Langdon, *The Epic of Creation*, p. 68, note 3.

- 23 ⁽¹⁾ confused indeed was Tiamat's mind (by their doings).
 24 Whirling through the "Heavenly Mansions"
 25 the noise they made could even be heard (lit.: did not diminish
 [as far away as] in the abyss!
 26 While Tiamat was acquiescent towards their [behaviour]
 27 their doings were greatly annoying to [Apsu] —
 28 (because) their actions were not decent any more since they had
 [reached sexual maturity! ⁽²⁾]

This last and tell-tale verse immediately evokes the age-old and world-wide story of primaeval incest so crassly exemplified *e. g.* in the Greek myth of Kronos, Rhea and Zeus. The poet, child of a more advanced age, rejects the tale about the radiant young god in incestual relations with his mother, its inevitable sequel of patricide, and the eventual apotheosis of the murderer, founder of a new world-order, who slaughters the old and hostile gods or imprisons them in abysmal regions. Not only did he substitute the motif of "noise" ⁽³⁾ for that of incest, but he attempts also to hide the individuality of the main actor — and we have every reason to assume that Ea was the lover of Tiamat — behind the anonymous plurality of the expression *at-ḫu-ú ilāniⁿⁱ* (line 21).

(*cf.* Meissner MAOG III/3 p. 26) and translating *šabdbu* (against v. Soden ZA XLI p. 171 note 3 *šapāpu = alāku*) by "to twitch, jerk, flash". The specific implications of this phrase remain obscure though it is rather clear that some noisy if not flashing activity was referred to. With regard to certain indications, discussed in the note 2, *šabdbu* could refer to optical rather than to acoustic phenomena.

⁽¹⁾ A more exacting critical attitude could easily declare this verse a spurious addition.

⁽²⁾ For this meaning of *eḫlu* *cf. e. g.* verse 89 of this tablet, and the revealing sequence *rabū* "to grow", *eḫlu* IV "to reach puberty, become mature" and *rašū mināte* "to assume the appearances (of an adult)", in King, *Seven Tablets* I p. 142 : 14. *Cf.* furthermore Jacobsen in JNES IV, p. 167, note 125.

⁽³⁾ The substitution of "noise" for sinful doings occurs also in the myth of Irra (Ebeling, *Der akkadische Mythos vom Pestgott* Era p. 4) KAR 168 : 39 and Luckenbill AJSL 39, p. 154 : 4-8 ("Atrahasis"). Note also that the religious lyric in Mesopotamia effectually contrasts the noisy activities of mankind with the silent glory of the heavens (*cf.* the famous "*Prière aux Dieux de la nuit*" and similar passages).

4 — En. E1 I:61-65.

When Apsu complained, clumsily and with insistence ⁽¹⁾, about his sleeplessness, asking permission from Tiamat to “exterminate” (*ḫalâqu* III/II is here *term. techn.*) the noisemakers, the mother of the gods reacts violently and forbids Apsu in no uncertain terms to interfere. Then a new actor appears on the scene: Mummu, the crafty adviser of the perplexed Apsu.

Using a sophisticated technical trick — our poet masters all the devices of his calling — the author chooses not to inform us concerning the “plan of Mummu”, a plan obviously conceived to circumvent the command of Tiamat and to end definitively the tribulations of Apsu. He prefers to describe elaborately the triumphant joy of Apsu when he listens to Mummu, and the pathetic consternation of the gods when “somebody” gives them intelligence (*uṣ-tan-nu-ni*, line 56) of this plan. It is clear that Tiamat herself has warned her lover, an incident which the censorship of our author could not admit into the text. The dreaded attack, of still undisclosed nature, induces Ea to adopt countermeasures which the lines 61–65 describe in a very condensed manner. My translation of these crucial verses runs as follows:

- 61 He (Ea) invented and manufactured against him (Apsu) a (magic
[called] *uṣrat kalī* ⁽²⁾),
62 making it cunningly so (strong) that its sacred conjuration– (power)
[was superior to (the magic used by) him (Apsu)];
63 he (then) recited it and (thus) transferred it(s power) into water,
64 and he poured this (magic) sleep(ing–draught) over him (Apsu)
[while he was sleeping in a cavern,
65 thus lulling Apsu into a (magic) sleep, he (who himself planned
[to] pour (over Ea) this sleep(ing–draught)!]

Thus, finally, the plan of Mummu is divulged. The cunning vizier had advised Apsu to eliminate Ea, son, rival and “noise-maker”,

⁽¹⁾ *Elītam zakāru* “to speak with raised voice” (cf. *elītam šasū* with a similar meaning in III : 125), in contradistinction to the idiom *šaplāti tamū* “to speak with a low voice” (against Deimel ŠL Vol. I no. 33/5).

⁽²⁾ These words remain a crux. For *uṣurtu*, denoting an object used by the conjuration priest, cf. e. g. Thompson, *Evil Spirits* I p. 22 : 210. Ea obviously creates here a specific type of conjuration-technique which his adepts continue to apply : *ú-ṣu-rat* ^{aE-a}.

by means of a magic soporific (*šittu* "sleep" and "sleeping-draught")⁽¹⁾, without killing him. Yet, this plan does not account fully for the consternation of the gods (lines 57-58) when they learned about it. The circumstantial description of their despair indicates that their very existence was jeopardized by the plan of Mummu. As a possible explanation I would like to refer to the fact that — as other mythological texts inform us — the "Water of Life", stored in the Netherworld, was indispensable for the vitality, even the existence of the gods. It is therefore not unlikely that Mummu's plan was to drug this precious water which the gods could not dispense with without endangering their lives.

In his fatal sleep, Apsu is robbed by Ea of the two insignia of kingship: mantle⁽²⁾ and tiara (lines 67-68). After taking the *melammû*⁽³⁾ away from his foe, Ea assumes the supernatural radiance befitting the ruler of the universe.

This robust mythological interlude with its contest of magic powers is duly concluded by the slaying of the Old Man, while the punishment meted out to his adviser remains somewhat obscure. From lines 72 and 117 it might be inferred that Mummu was not killed on the spot but held on a nose-rope by the triumphant Ea. Line 66, however, remains a crux. It would fit perfectly into the mythological pattern if we could interpret this line as referring to a castration of Mummu, as a substitution of an original castration of Apsu. On the other hand, if the words *da-la-piš ku-û-ru* could be translated as "too short to run (with)"; and taken as describing the legs of a Mummu conceived as a dwarf, it would perhaps explain the peculiar way in which Apsu expressed his gratitude for Mummu's clever advice (lines 53-55). He placed him on his lap in order to kiss him. Under these circumstances, the well-known figure of the bowlegged and ithyphallic dwarf⁽⁴⁾ on Near-Eastern

(1) For the connexion between *šittu* and *rešû* cf. also K 3650 II : 2 published in ZA 4 p. 33 (p. 9 transliteration).

(2) For the idiom *riksa pašāru* "to undress" cf. my remarks in *Orientalia* NS XIV p. 239 ff.

(3) For *melammû* cf. my study in JAOS LXIII p. 31 ff.

(4) The correct reading of the signs UD LA KU (Poebel *apud* Heidel : *lam-la-ku* which is philologically impossible; Labat : *uḫ-la-tuš*) would greatly contribute to the elucidation of this passage.

Note that Apsu calls Mummu a *muffb kabillia* "who brings me into good mood" which reminds one of the characterization of a Babylonian court-

cylinder-seals could well reflect one, very primitive, aspect of Mammu (4).

5 — En. El. I:71-78.

The verses which describe the triumph of Ea are definitely in disorder. Two versions can easily be separated:

73 After he had put his adversaries in fetters and was standing (as
[victor] on the(ir) necks,

74 Ea erected a monument (commemorating) his triumph over his
[enemies (2)],

75 and (then) rested in his cella in order to repose.

and:

69 He fettered Apsu and slew him,

70 he bound Mammu, laying him crosswise over him (Apsu);

71 then he established his seat upon the Abyss (*apsu*)

76 and he called this (place) Apsu, declaring it a sanctuary.

official of high rank in S. Smith, *Ist Campaign of Sennacherib*, line 33, as *munammir řem rubútišu* "who entertains his lordship", and the passage Budge-King AAA p. 388 f. (Luckenbill AR I § 63) referring to the scribe of an Assyrian king with the words: *mu-ři-ib řib-bi béli-řú* (line 4) "who entertains his lord".

Again, the implications of this phrase escape us. It is not likely to denote a specific rank or position in court because it occurs too rarely but we might hazard the guess that it referred to court-jesters or the like. In favour of such an interpretation is the fact that dwarfs (dancing and playing musical instruments) were used for the entertainment of the Egyptian kings and that the Akkadian word for dwarf (*tigru*, cf. Jastrow, *Religion* II, p. 317, note 7, p. 914, note 1, Holma, *Quttulu*, p. 90) seems to be connected with Egypt. *dng*, which again is a loan-word from the Ethiopic. Thus these entertaining pygmies seem to have been exported from Central Africa as far as Mesopotamia.

(4) For the more spiritualized aspect of this strange and interesting figure, I refer to the articles of F. M. Th. Böhl (*Mammu = Logos*) in *OLZ* 1916 p. 265 ff. St. Langdon (*The Babylonian Conception of the Logos*) in *JRAS* 1919, p. 433 ff, and of W. F. Albright (*The supposed Babylonian derivation of the Logos*) in the *Journal of Bibl. Literature* 1920, p. 143 ff.

(2) The use of the nose-rope, the erection of a stele with triumphal inscriptions (*irnittu*), the typical gesture of the victor (*řép-ka sa-ad nakri* in CT XX pl. 39 II : 12) bespeak a concept of warfare which is well exemplified in Mesopotamia in the literature and the iconography of the Akkad-period.

77 There he erected a "Holy Grove" for himself.
 78 and Ea and Damkina celebrated (lit. : sat down) (therein) in ma-
 [jesty the Sacred Marriage!

This festival terminates the Ea story. In the outdoor sanctuary of the *giparu* ⁽¹⁾ the new world-*era* is inaugurated by a solemn cohabitation which is to yield the sun-god and future ruler of the world ⁽²⁾.

The above proposed dissection of the verses 69-78 has discarded the line 72, describing Ea as holding Mummu by a nose-rope, because it seems out of place in both versions which our poet was not able to fuse into a harmonious unit.

From the literary point of view, it should be noted that the Ea story as told in *Enûma Eliš* in its condensed form is basically a doublette of the Marduk story. It is used, however, very skillfully by the poet as an overture which touches briefly upon the main "Leitmotifs" and thus instills curiosity, and prepares the listener for what is to come.

6 — En. El. I:87-100.

The Marduk-story too has a hymnical introit (*cf.* lines I: 17-20 of the Ea story) which underlines the fact that this god was born "in the destined sanctuary, the (pre)determined abode" (line 79). Begotten by a god, borne by a goddess, this child takes in additional divine power through his heavenly wetnurses (line 86) a fact which is in line with concepts reflected in Sumerian and Assyrian historical inscriptions.

87 His figure was luxuriant, sparkling the glance of his eyes;
 88 mature the moment he was born, he was able to beget from the
 [very beginning (of his existence).

When this child, precocity is a typical feature of the "sun-god", was presented to his father, probably following an age-old custom

⁽¹⁾ This *giparu* (Sum. *gipar*) (*cf.* S. Smith, *Babyl. Hist. Texts.* p. 56, AOB I p. 40 note 6, Böhl, *Symb. Koschaker* p. 175 f.) has to be differentiated from the *giparu* in line 6 (*cf.* no. 1) though both shades of meaning go back to the same basic word which denotes a shadowy grove.

⁽²⁾ The Assyrian version replaces, as is well known, Ea and Damkina with the couple *Laḫmu* and *Laḫamu* in order to give the national god *Anšar-Aššur* an older parentage.

- 115 "you have been weak-hearted and (so it comes that) we (still)
[have no (peace to) sleep!
- 116 "Think of Apsu, your mate,
117 "and of Mummu who was put in fetters — now you are left
[alone
- 118 "you are [] and in restless agitation.
119 "[] do you not love us (any more)?
120 "[Look how] our eyes are reddened (?) (by insomnia) (4)
121 "[and do restore (?)] darkness (?) (5) that we may sleep
[(again)]
- 122 "[Go to bat]tle, avenge them,
123 "[do . . .] and annihilate (them)!"

The most interesting part of this eloquent harangue is line 114 with its puzzling reference to a weapon which Apsu is said to have created for the purpose of defeating the gods, yet this terror-inspiring "sawdagger" (5) is decidedly the characteristic weapon of the Sungod which he uses daily to cut open the gates of heaven when rising in the East. Here, allusion is made to mythological stories which remain, unfortunately, obscure. Did Apsu create this peculiar weapon to penetrate into the "Heavenly Mansions" surrounded by a wall of flame (*cf.* no. 8), just as Shamash used the "saw" every morning to penetrate the glow of the dawn? Far more important, however, than such shreds of lost myths, is the fact that our verse records a different version of the Ea story, a version in which Apsu patently had a more "heroic" role than in that which the *Enûma Eliš* happened to preserve.

(4) Or *verkümmert* according to Kraus, *Texte zur Bab. Physiognomatik* p. 33, note 48, Stamm MVAeG XLIV p. 264. *Cf.* also the passage Thompson, *Evil Spirits* II p. 66 (CT XVII 19 : 23) discussed by Albright JAOS XLVIII p. 179 and RA XVI p. 182 (*hamru* "cloudy", referring to eyes).

(2) For *sa-ki-pa* I refer to *sakápu ša šaláli* discussed by S. Smith in *Babyl. Hist. Texts* p. 12 note (*cf.* also the Kassite seal, Langdon RA XVI p. 92 no. 54 : 6 *sukkupu*). Labat translates very aptly *la sa-ki-pa* with *sans relâche*.

(3) For *šašaru* "saw" as an actual weapon *cf. e. g.* *ša-aš-ša-ar tu-uq-ma-tum* (beside *pa-ša-ar qa-ab-li*) in Pinches JRAS Cent. Suppl. p. 71 V : 16.

8 — En. E1. I:152-161.

The secession of the gods (line 128 “they separated themselves⁽¹⁾ and sided with Tiamat”) and the creation of a demonic host by Tiamat precede the decisive revolutionary act, the elevation of one of the rebel gods, Kingu, to leadership. His offices are specified in lines 148-150: leader of the army, captain of the levy, standard-bearer of the *melée* who gives the sign for the attack, battle-master and booty-warden (?)⁽²⁾. In a solemn speech, Tiamat further enhances Kingu’s position by handing over to him the “Charm of (Supreme) Power” which endows its carrier with magic omnipotence. This powerful amulet, a kind of tag, apparently to be fastened around the neck (*cf.* IV:122) is, therefore, no “Tablet of Destinies” in the Epic of Creation or in other texts of this literary type.

- 152 “I (Tiamat) have given you magic power (*tū*) and an exalted
[position in the assembly of the gods,
153 “making you the counsellor (*cf.* line 151) of all the gods,
154 “(but now) you shall be elevated to a still higher rank: you
[shall be my only mate!
155 “Your orders shall prevail over (those of) all the (other) An-
[nunaki!”
156 Then she gave him the ‘Charm of (Supreme) Power’ and fa-
[stened (it) on his breast (saying):
157 “(Now) your command cannot be changed, the word you utter
[will be final!”

Thus endowed with supreme power Kingu hastens to give the signal for the attack. He pronounces this order in two verses (160-161) which are rather difficult. In these two lines the remarkably skillfully composed first tablet reaches its culmination-point. The effect of Kingu’s order is circumstantially described in the next tablet, yet the order itself remains obscure:

- 158 When Kingu was thus exalted and had assumed the rank of Anu
159 he gave the (following) order to his divine sons:

(1) To *mašáru* “to draw a line”.

(2) Very uncertain. Literature on this term: Walther LSS IV/4 p.121 ff., Lewy ZA NF II p. 20 (note 2), AOB I p. 19 note 5, 148 note 4, San Nicolò-Ungnad NRV I p. 13 note 6, M. David OLZ 36, p. 218.

- 160 "Your word (alone) shall make the flames die down ⁽¹⁾,
 161 "shall render powerless ⁽²⁾ the *magšaru*-weapon ⁽²⁾ (which is)
 [so powerful when swung!"]

The first verse clearly refers to the very same "*Waberlohe*" which the "saw-dagger" of Apsu was destined to cut apart. A wall of flame protected the "Heavenly Mansions" of the Marduk-clan, but the magic power conferred upon Kingu by Tiamat was sufficient "to make die down the fire". More difficult is the second verse which I am inclined to link tentatively to the apotropaic quality of noise produced by special tools. I do not mean that *magšaru* (a staff-like weapon) corresponds simply to the "bull-roarer" used all over the world to frighten demons away but it is quite clear that the dancing *magšaru gašru ina šitmuri* was part of the defense-system of the *dei superi*. Fire and noise are everywhere effective means of chasing demonic powers away. The command of the bearer of the "Charm of Supreme Power", however, makes an end of both and the gods consider themselves lost. Their terrible danger is used by the poet to put Marduk's role as saviour in the greatest possible relief.

9 — En. E1. II:73-85.

When it is reported to Ea, here patently in the role of a vizier of the gods, that "Tiamat has turned wicked in order to avenge Apsu" (line 3), he hastens to inform his father Anšar. The poet takes pains to describe the effect of this bad news: Ea "became speechless, sitting down in silent gloom" (line 6) while Anšar

⁽¹⁾ The verbs *nāhu* and *rabābu* (cf. also Meissner, *Suppl.* p. 87 b) are approximately synonymous and often occur side by side. Cf. *Babyloniaca* VII p. 184 note 6, Harper ABL 1127 : 67 Bauer, *Assurbanipal* II p. 82 note, von Soden ZA NF VII p. 170, etc.

⁽²⁾ For *magšaru* as a weapon cf. Meissner BAWb I p. 67 (unpublished Berlin vocabulary) and Falkenstein LTBA I no. 37 (and Van der Meer Kish 65) [to ḪAR-r a = *ḫubullu*, 7th tablet] with the equation: *giš-tukul-za-ḫa-da = ma-ag-ša-ru*, also: *kulmu* and *kalmakru*, all denoting axes (or a pestle if Sum. *za.ḫa.du* is loanword from Akk. *ṣahātu* "to press oil, wine"). *Magšaru* belongs to *gišru* (type of bridge, cf. my *Material Culture* index s. v.), *gaširu* (scepter, cf. S. Smith *Ist Camp.* I. 31), *gušuru* "beam" and *gašišu* "pole".

The silence of Anšar who only nods wearily towards Ea, the paralysis which befalls all the Anunnaki, *etc.* all this yields a dark enough backdrop for the introduction of the saviour Marduk. Lines 90-91 sum up the situation: "None of the gods can penetrate to [Tiamat], (none) can escape alive who has to face her!"

10 — En. E1. II:96-103, 117-129.

From the very allusive indications of these lines, the startling fact results that an important episode of the early life of Marduk has been omitted by the censorship of the poet. Marduk apparently committed a deed which not only caused the hatred of his brothers (attempt to seize power?) but also forced himself into hiding before the wrath of Father Anšar. Ea seems to have been instrumental in protecting and hiding his too ambitious son in wise foresight of the emergency now at hand.

Suddenly, in this moment of supreme crisis, Anšar "remembered" (line 93 [*i*]-*ta-bil lib-ba-šu-ma*)⁽¹⁾ his grandchild and

96 he called for Marduk. Ea (then) went to his hiding place (*a-šar*
[*pi-ris-ti-šu*])

97 in order to inform him (Marduk) of a secret plan of his (Ea's) own
98 (saying): "Marduk, consider my advice, listen to your father;
99 "you alone, my son, are able to bring alleviation to his (Anšar's)
[heart!

100 "When you are with Anšar approach him (therefore) daringly
101 "and state your conditions!⁽²⁾ Take your stand before him
[(without fear) he will be peaceful when he sees you."

Marduk apparently had good reasons to be afraid of the interview with Anšar, and Ea patently tries to allay his apprehensions. The main purpose of this speech, however, is to advise his son to make the best use of the desperate situation of the gods.

102 The lord (Marduk) was happy over the advice of his father,
103 he approached (Anšar), took his stand before him.

⁽¹⁾ For this idiom *cf.* my remarks in JAOS LXI p. 256 b.

⁽²⁾ *Pá epēšu* has here a definite idiomatic meaning, while *epuš pi* (noun) in VI:33 means something like "idea, concept" and in II:127, VI:3 simply "command, utterance".

Attention should be called to the political aspects of this declaration of the gods. Here, they change from tribal chieftains electing a king in a period of emergency, to officials who can be promoted or demoted by an omnipotent monarch. They furthermore concede Marduk a place of worship in their own temples as an unequivocal expression of his sovereignty, with the rather technical restriction (smacking of compromise) that this provision should only go into effect in rebuilt sanctuaries. Thus they cease to be rulers within a more or less loosely connected confederation of tribes, to assume the position of governors in whose palaces the shrine dedicated to their overlord patently bespeaks the lost independence. How far these and similar passages in the epical literature reflect typical historical situations in certain regions of Mesopotamia remains to be investigated.

Lines 33-34 still show the trend of thought which advocates appeasement of Tiamat instead of battle ("after his divine parents had transferred their (!) power to Bel they dispatched him on an errand of peaceful settlement")⁽¹⁾, but the following description of Marduk's preparations for his attack clearly bespeak his true intentions.

13 — En. E1. IV:61-62.

For the attack on Tiamat, Marduk is equipped with quite an array of weapons, but only two will actually be used: the bow (line 36 "he topped (the arrow) with an arrow-head and attached the string (to the bow)")⁽²⁾ and the net the purpose of which is described in the lines 41-44. "He made a net; to encompass Tiamat within it he stretched (it) in all four directions and posted close to the net the South-Wind, North-Wind, East-Wind (and) West-Wind, given to him by his father Anu, so that no part of her (serpent-shaped?) body could protrude".

Among the weapons which Marduk was not actually to use in the impending battle we find the *mifū*-pike (for his right hand) and the *abūbu*-mace. The "lightning bolt placed in front of him" (line 39)

⁽¹⁾ *Šu-ul-mu u taš-me-e* means literally: "to say *šulmu* "peace" and be listened to"; cf. for similar idioms K. F. Müller MVAeG XLI/3 p. 35f.

⁽²⁾ The use of a composite bow seems to be indicated by the fact that Marduk strings it immediately before the attack.

and the flaring flames with which he filled his body (line 40), as well as the *puluhtu*-mailcoat and the awe-inspiring *melammû* on his head, are not simply defensive in purpose, they endow Marduk with additional divine power which the religious concept of the ancient Near East visualized in brilliancy, fire and flames.

Lines 61-62 reveal, however, that Marduk used still other, magical, means to enhance his "*élan vital*", "*mana-power*", etc.:

61 On [his] lips are drawn (4) [magic ornaments?] with red paste
62 (and) in his hand he is holding the "Plant" to annihilate the
[(deadly mephitic) smell.

These preparations clearly show that Marduk is planning a *descensus ad inferos*, to fight Tiamat in her realm, the Netherworld. This is so dangerous a venture, even for a god, that he is obliged to resort to the use of the most primitive magic known in the history of mankind. He paints his face with lines in life-carrying red (2). The meaning of the second line (62) is illustrated by a parallel episode in the Sumerian account of Ishtar's descent to the Netherworld (cf. S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* [*Proceedings Am. Philosophical Society*, Vol. 85] p. 297, line 25) which I propose to translate as follows:

"The aromatic plant (called) 'May I persist! May I persist!' (3)
[she held before her nose."

It cannot be decided whether the aromatic plant which Ishtar as well as Marduk used in order to counteract the mephitic stench of the Netherworld is to be identified with the fabulous "Plant of Life" or belongs to the category of "life-carrying" plants which are considered "numinous" on account of their characteristic forms, colors or smells.

Marduk was not to go to battle alone. The seven evil wind-demons follow him who created them and let them loose. They are part of his master-plan and destined to "turn up the interior of Tiamat"

(4) Text: "on [his] lips he has (*û-kal-lu*) [] (made of/with) red paste"; for *kullu* "to have (an abscess)" cf. Thompson RA XXVII p. 134 note 4 and JRAS 1929 p. 814 note 4.

(2) Cf. for illustration, G.-B. Luquet, *L'Art et la Religion des hommes fossiles*, Paris 1926 p. 185 (with literature). For this reference I am indebted to Dr. Phyllis Ackerman.

(3) Cf. the Sumerian personal name *Hé-n-a-d-u* quite frequent in Ur III texts (or Akk. *Libluš*) etc.

(line 48) at the strategic moment. A chariot drawn by four⁽¹⁾ “irresistible and prancing storm-monsters” (line 50) with tell-tale names, is his vehicle. In the manner of the single chariot-driver, he fastens their reins to his girdle (line 51)⁽²⁾ to be able to use both hands in the struggle.

14 — En. E1. IV:73-86.

With irritating inconsistency, the text of our poem has, so far, mentioned quite a number of attacks directed or planned by the deities of the abyss against their brothers in the heavenly mansions. Apsu intended to drug them with a soporific, or to attack them with his strange *šaššaru* weapon; Kingu ordered an attack with the enigmatic instructions contained in the two last lines of the first tablet, while some verses of the second and the fourth tablet (II: 81, IV: 66) mention a specific stratagem of the fiendish couple Kingu and Tiamat which had already proven its efficiency against Ea and Anu (*cf.* above no. 9). It failed, however, against Marduk. “He (Marduk) only looks and already his (Kingu’s) advance becomes confused, his mind perplexed, his actions uncoordinated” (lines 67-68). Only Tiamat “did not turn her neck”, and this reveals that none of her allies — although endowed by her with a divine *melammû* (*cf.* I: 134-135) could bear the sight of the flaming glory of Marduk with his double godhead (*cf.* I: 91) or tenfold *melammû* (I: 103) (and of the above mentioned additional optical phenomena) with which the foresight of his father Ea had provided him.

Strange as it may seem to us, neither Ea himself nor Anu was able to face the terror-inspiring glare or Medusa-like stare of the demonic Tiamat who alone proved an equal to Marduk. Without diverting her eyes, she pronounced her conjuration — but without effect on her adversary.

Now follows a short exchange of belligerent speeches before the battle is joined. The astute wording of both speeches is worth noticing. In their patent efforts to win over the onlooking followers

⁽¹⁾ For very early representations of chariots drawn by four animals, I refer to predynastic clay-figurines from Kish, *etc.*

⁽²⁾ Text: *na-aš-ma-di i-du-uš-ša i-lul*; to *našmadu* and *elêlu* *cf.* my *Material Culture* index s. v.

of the enemy by treating them cunningly as misled victims, they are pervaded with the mood of bitter "civil" wars:

- 73 (Tiamat): "Important indeed is [your position] (now) that all the
[gods are in rebellion against you,
74 "having turned from your side to their own!"
75 The Lord [brandished] the *abûbu*-mace, his mighty weapon,
76 and addressed the (following) words to the enraged Tiamat:
77 "[You alone rev]olted, ambitious as you are,
78 "you (alone) conceived the idea of calling to arms!
79 "[Now they ri]ot and act wrongly against their family
80 "while you, their [own mother], have discarded [all mo]therly
[feelings!
81 "And then you have promoted Kingu to be your mate
82 "thus replacing the authority of Anu with your illegal authority.
83 "You also had evil intentions against Anšar, the king of the
[gods,
84 "and you have actually proven your wickedness against my
[divine fathers (*i. e.* Ea and Anu)!
85 "Even if your army is prepared and is equipped with weapons
[you (gave them)
86 "come you near (alone), and in single combat I and you shall
[fight!"

16 — En. E1. IV:103-114.

Tiamat seems to have been invulnerable in the sense that her skin could not be penetrated by any weapon. This may safely be inferred from the fact that Marduk's plan of attack was basically devised to make her open her mouth, obviously because it was her only vulnerable spot. After having encircled the monster with his net Marduk sends forth the *imhullu*-demon whom he had previously hidden in the rear-guard (line 96). Promptly Tiamat swallowed the *imhullu* who presently blew up her body and forced her to gape her mouth in pain. This was the moment for which Marduk was waiting. He shot an arrow through the open mouth into her interior, thus killing the otherwise invulnerable Tiamat:

- 103 (Thus) he brought her down and ended her life;
104 he threw the corpse (to the ground) in order to mount on it.
105 After he had killed Tiamat, the(ir) leader,

The balance of the fourth tablet describes the use Marduk made of the formless corpse of Tiamat (division of upper and lower waters separated by a well guarded dyke⁽¹⁾, line 139), and his search for a fitting abode (*cf.* the parallel episode of the Ea-story in I: 76-77).

18 — En. E1. V:14-22.

In a diction which is graced with a rare blend of exact technical language and poetic solemnity, the creative activities of Marduk are reported in the initial verses of the fifth tablet. He constructed celestial stations for all the great gods, creating stars as their representatives. He established the length of the year, determined its subdivisions, and fixed the point called *Nibiru* "to establish their exact relations" (line 6), setting up the "stations" of Enlil and Ea "that none (of the planets) might make a mistake or go astray" (line 7). Doors were set up in the East and in the West for the daily course of the sun, the creation of which, however, is not mentioned in the preserved part of this tablet⁽²⁾. Line 11 is probably to be omitted as an unnecessary repetition of verse 138 of the preceding tablet.

The moon, the "jewel⁽³⁾ of the night" (line 13), is destined to determine the counting of the days within the month and is honored by a solemn "creation speech":

- 14 "Monthly without end be (first) drawn in (the form of) a dim
[circle
15 "and, on the very first day of the month, (begin to) shine over
the country!
16 "(Then) make your horns (increasingly) brilliant⁽⁴⁾ to indicate
[the (first) six days,

⁽¹⁾ For *parku* and *pariktu* as denominations for certain types of dykes *cf.* my *Material Culture* index *s. v.*

⁽²⁾ Obviously, the text considers Marduk a solar deity (*cf.* to the lines I: 101-102, A. Poebel in *AJSL* LI p. 172).

⁽³⁾ For *šukuttu* "jewel" *cf.* my *Material Culture* index *s. v.*

⁽⁴⁾ Text: "you shall be splendid with regard to the horns"; *cf.* for *nabû* in this nuance Thureau-Dangin, *Rit. Acc.* p. 135 note 1 (RA X p. 224, XVI p. 168). Note the difference between *nabû* in line 15 and *nabû* in line 16.

The role of mankind, as conceived by Marduk, is that of serfs in a feudal system. They are but machines devised to provide their lords with the necessities for their subsistence. It must be noted how cleverly the poet distributes the roles in the dialogue just translated; Ea in his conservative, law-abiding and cautious attitude, in contradistinction to the more radical, hasty if ingenious Marduk. The purpose is quite obvious: to show that the original idea was Marduk's while the function of Ea is that of improving and putting into actual execution as can be seen from line 35 which clearly stresses that Ea (text: ^a*É-a-ma*) created mankind. Lines 37-38, however, show again the author's desire to make both gods share in the credit for this wonderful work:

37 This work (the creation of man) is impossible to understand,
38 Nudimmud (*i. e.* Ea) [performed it] according to the clever idea
[of Marduk!]

In a speech which shows the diplomatic abilities of Marduk, he addresses the rebels ⁽¹⁾ in ingratiating terms ⁽²⁾:

21 "If there was any truth in your first confession
22 "speak under oath (again) the truth to me (with regard to this
[question]):
23 "Who was it who stirred up the revolt
24 "and incited Tiamat to rebel, assembled the troupe?
25 "If ⁽³⁾ he who stirred up the revolt is handed over
26 I shall make him suffer the punishment for his crime — (then)
[you shall be released!"]

They comply and must themselves cut the arteries of their former leader Kingu ⁽⁴⁾, an astute stratagem of Marduk who thus

⁽¹⁾ They are called here Anunnaki, but when they comply with Marduk's request they are termed ^a*I-gi-gi ilâni rabûti* (line 28). From this and other indications it is obvious that the author of the sixth tablet is rather careless with regard to the designations used for the gods of the Marduk-clan, the imprisoned rebel gods, *etc.* He often uses indiscriminately, sometimes inconsistently, such terms as "Great Gods", "Igigi" and "Anunnaki".

⁽²⁾ The text stresses that Marduk treated these gods *ta-bi-iš*.

⁽³⁾ For the translation of *lu* with the imperfectum as "if" *cf.* a forthcoming syntactic study of mine.

⁽⁴⁾ This again is at variance with the fate of Kingu as reported in IV: 120.

spares the loyal gods the odium of such a deed. The newly created man is now charged with the service of the gods (*i-mi-id du-ul-li* line 34, repeated in line 36) while these are exempted (*ilē-ma um-taš-šir*).

The theme of the reorganization⁽¹⁾ of the universe, already touched upon in line 10 (cf. p. 233 note 5), is now taken up again and treated in detail. The divine spheres of influence are being established with 300 gods taking up guard-duty in the upper realm while as many are assigned to the lower (*iršitu*). After having thus received their commissions (*term. techn.: tērtu mu²uru*) and been assigned their duties (*term. techn.: tērtu muddū*), the gods offer to erect for Marduk a sanctuary roomy enough to harbor them all when they come to visit their overlord and to do him homage (lines 49-54). Again Marduk improves upon this plan (he proposes a *parakku ibru* instead of the planned *parakku nīmedu*) but we cannot appreciate his wisdom due to the fact that the technical terms used in these verses (lines 47-58) remain obscure.

20 — En. El. VI:108-121.

The organization of the "executive branch" of the world-government is the main topic of the middle part of the sixth tablet. A new banquet-scene introduces the important statement that:

78 the functions (of all the gods) were established, (their) compe-
[tencies defined,
79 the positions in Heaven and in the Netherworld were set up by
[(an assembly of) all the gods;
80 (then) fifty of the gods took over their offices,
81 (while a committee of) seven gods wielded the power [over man-
[kind proper]⁽²⁾.

Another important statement is contained in verses 108-121, but a break in the tablet has prevented, so far, the correct understanding of this passage. In a very sophisticated and scholarly interpretation of Marduk's position as "the god of the gods", the poet calls the

⁽¹⁾ *Šanū* II and *nakālu* II (hendiadys) (in the verses 9 and 43) require the translation given in the text ("to repeat, to make clever").

⁽²⁾ Omit line 83 as a clumsy addition in a report which deals exclusively with the bow as sacred symbol of Marduk (lines 82-92).

gods worshippers of Marduk who thus set a pious example to mankind for its attitude towards the gods. The gods call themselves *šalmat qaqqadi* ("black-headed"), a term which usually denotes mankind as a whole, but when they ask humanity to follow their example, they use the term *šalmat qaqqadi wašba* [].

- 108 (the gods speaking): "He (Marduk) shall be the shepherd of the
[black headed (= the gods) [].
- 109 (and) they shall recite [his name, or: remember his deeds] with-
[out forgetting for all days to come!
- 110 He (Marduk) shall allot (as their share) many offerings to his
[fathers (= the gods)
- 111 (so) that they (shall be able to) provide for their upkeep and
[(to) look after their sanctuaries;
- 112 he (Marduk) shall (furthermore) provide (them) with incense to
[smell (and) promote their magic power ⁽¹⁾.
- 113 In (exact) correspondence with (this situation in) heaven they
[*i. e.* men] shall act/behave on earth,
- 114 he (Marduk) shall instruct the blackheaded, those who li[ve on
[earth?]
- 115 to remind them, as subjects, of their gods,
- 116 his command shall also provide shares for the goddesses.
- 118 ⁽²⁾ Without (ever) forgetting they (*i. e.* men) shall worship their
[gods,
- 119 make their land beautiful, erect (new) sanctuaries for them!
- 120 May the blackheaded (*i. e.* mankind) stand (worshipping) before
[us, the(ir) gods
- 121 but he (Marduk) shall be the god of every one of us!"

21 - En. E1. VII: 145-148.

The hymnal epilogue, with its enumeration of the 50 sacred names of Marduk, is followed by (at least) two groups of verses 145-148 and 149-156 (157 ff. too damaged) which contain pious

⁽¹⁾ We should, perhaps, bring the two verbs of this line in a causal relation ("to provide with incense to smell in order to increase (*šušqú*) their *šú*") and take this passage as revealing the cultic function of the burning of incense in Mesopotamia.

⁽²⁾ I omitted verse 117 ("they [*i. e.* men] shall [thus] bring offerings to their gods as well as to their goddesses") because it repeats unnecessarily the content of the couplet 115-116.

remarks of the scribe or author, as is customary in this type of cuneiform literature. The first group is of special interest:

- 145 That (these verses) be (always) remembered (lit.: kept) the old
[traditioner shall explain (them).
146 the wise one and the scholar shall discuss (them) among them-
[selves;
147 the father shall teach (their content) to his son and instruct
[him,
148 (even) shepherds and herdsmen shall be given knowledge (of them)!]

These verses reflect, indeed, an amazingly elaborate program of religious life with regard to both theological studies and religious education. The most characteristic feature of this program is the division made in the religious community between theologians and laymen. Two types of the first are mentioned, *maḥrû*, the "old men" who carry the oral tradition with the correct (orthodox) interpretation (*term. techn.: kullumu*)⁽¹⁾, and the *enqu mûdû*, the experts and scholars whose task it apparently was to discuss (*malâku*) the text, to study it, *etc.* Their professional learning separates the theologians from the laymen. While the first are differentiated according to their work, the latter fall into two groups on account of their social standing. We have the "shepherds and herdsmen" who live in the country-side on a low social and economic level, yet — so our scribe postulates — they should be given some kind of religious knowledge. The city-dwellers, however, are supposed to have had some religious education and they are obliged, by our scribe, to hand it down to their children. "The father shall instruct his son" says the text using the verb *šunnû* "to make repeat".

Clearly, these lines reflect a priestly concept of religious life which — ephemeral and locally restricted as it might be in Mesopotamia — still challenges a comparison with well-known and still valid requirements and values of the religions of the *aḥl-el-kitab*-type ("adherents of (a religion with) a (sacred) book"). This resemblance is furthermore accentuated when we keep in mind that the poem was to be recited by a priest on the fourth day of the New Year's festival⁽²⁾ "from its beginning to its end".

⁽¹⁾ For *kullumu* cf. a forthcoming lexicographical note.

⁽²⁾ This recitation took place in front of the Bêl-image while the symbols of the gods Anu and Ellil remained covered.

Further evidence for the concept of a "sacred book" alive in certain circles of priests, will be discussed in the third section.

In a final remark, I wish to draw the attention of the reader of the Epic of Creation to its conspicuous lack of literary and stylistic (not philological) homogeneity. The literary level of the text shifts with startling suddenness. From the majestic pace of the proem, for instance, it drops to lame verses, obviously meant to provide a stopgap or to bridge a cleavage in the composition. From verses of a dusty scholastic pedantry, it quickly shifts to passages of inspired beauty. Side by side, often in adjacent verses, we find concise, clear-cut diction, and an uneasy allusiveness hurrying over obscure or rejected incidents. A presentation which tells its tale with compressed and confusing words, is immediately followed by a passage of comfortable, even circumstantial, wordiness full of tiring repetitions which loves to play with words and to cram the poem with learned theological niceties.

There are, furthermore, as I have attempted to show in various cases, quite a number of added, interpolated, spurious and misplaced verses, and, above all, unmistakable traces of a not too consistent censorship with respect to religious ideas, moral concepts, *etc.* which endeavors to eliminate or, at least, to re-interpret stories and facts which the priestly poet had outgrown.